



BELIEVERS CHAPEL

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The Sermons of S. Lewis Johnson

Systematic Theology

TRANSCRIPT

“The Power of God, part I (Can God Do Everything?)”

[Prayer] Father, we thank Thee for the privilege of the study of the Scriptures. We thank Thee for the theology of the word of God, and we pray Lord that Thou wilt enable us to think the thoughts that the Holy Spirit would have us to think. And may we grow in the knowledge of Thee and may our knowledge that the spirit gives us produce righteousness in our lives. We know that the word of God is profitable for doctrine, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, for reproof, that the Man of God may be perfect, truly fitted unto every good work. And may, Lord, the Word fulfill its purpose in our lives tonight. We commit this time to Thee now. In Jesus' name. Amen.

[Message] Tonight our subject is “The Power of God, *or* Can God Do Everything?” And for Scripture reading, turn with me to Genesis chapter 18, and let me read just two verses. These are verses that are set in the context of the visit to Abraham by the three men who turn out to be God and two angels. And it is the time that Abraham and Sarah are given the promise that it is Sarah who shall bear Abraham the son who is to be the seed. And in verse 13, we read, “And the Lord said to Abraham, ‘Why did Sarah laugh, saying shall I indeed bear a child when I am so old?’ Is anything too difficult for the Lord

at the appointed time I will return to you at this time next year, and Sarah shall have a son.”

If God is all-powerful, can he make a square triangle? Can he make the past, present? Can he make the sun shine and not shine at the same time? Can God die? Was it impossible to destroy the world after Adam’s fall?

Well all of these are questions that involve the Power of God, which is the attribute that we want to look at tonight. Assuming that he is all-powerful, does this absolute power swallow up all creaturely independence? In other words, does God, when he in his Word teaches us that he is all-powerful, does he thereby rob us of any independence at all? Does God, as one theologian puts it, “limit himself,” by creating something, which is not himself, which he endows with a relative independence?

Now the answers to these questions, I hope to give tonight as we study part one of “The Power of God, or Can God Do Everything?”

Now we have been discussing the incommunicable attributes and are now studying the communicable attributes, and we have looked at knowledge and wisdom and we should spend some time on veracity but for the sake of proceeding through to the finish of our series I want to just say a word about veracity now, which is the third of our communicable attributes. As you can tell, this is one of the intellectual attributes of God, like knowledge and wisdom.

Now this question of the veracity of God is a very -- I think -- simple enough for us to consider in just a few moments and there are two things that are indicated by the term, “The veracity of God.”

In the first place, it is indicated by this that he is the true God, as over against all false gods. He’s the source of all truth in every field of knowledge, as well. You may remember that Jesus said, in John chapter 17, in connection with the true God, he said, “That they might believe Thee, the only true God and Jesus Christ whom Thou hast sent.”

And that expression in John chapter 17, verse 3, “The only True God” is designed to stress the fact that the Father is the only True or genuine God as over against a false gods.

And so when we speak of the veracity of God, we’re speaking of the fact that he is the true God over against all false gods. And of course the fact that he is the true God means that he is true in every sphere, metaphysically and in other spheres. And consequently we must as a result of believing that he is the only “True God,” believe that he is the source of all truth. And that even scientific knowledge will find its harmonization with the truth of God because he is the true God.

The second thing that the term “The veracity of God indicates,” is that He is faithful to his promises. Because he is a veracious God, he is faithful to the word that he promises. Numbers chapter 23, verse 19, expresses this in a verse that we will look at again tonight later. Numbers chapter 23, verse 19, where we read, “God is not a man that he should lie. Nor a son of man that he should repent as he said and will he not do it? Or has he spoken and will he not make it good? As he said, and will he not do it. He is faithful to his promises.” So the three attributes, knowledge, wisdom and veracity are the three intellectual attributes of the communicable attributes of God.

Now tonight we want to look at the power of God, and this, of course, is one of the volitional attributes of God. We will ultimately study the sovereign will of God when we finish this. And the two together make up the volitional attributes of God.

And first of all -- I need to put our outline on don’t I. The outline that we will be following is this, the title, “The Power of God, or Can God Do Everything?”

We just finished the introductions, and so we are at Roman I: The nature of the Power of God. And Capital A, its definition, What is the Power of God? Berkoff, in his theology, defines the Power of God as, “that perfection of his being by which he is the absolute and highest causality.” The Power of God, “that perfection of his being by which he is the absolute and highest causality.” Shedd, another theologian, has defined the Power of God as, “The divine essence energizing and producing outward effects.” Now

that’s very simple. The Power of God is the being of God energizing or working and producing outward effects. And so we can say, the Power of God is God working things that are outside of himself.

Now God works things that are within himself -- we’ll say something about that in a moment -- but the Power of God has to do with his activity outside of himself. Capital B: Its characteristics. We can say these things about the Power of God.

First, it is the divine activity, *ad extra*. Now that’s what I said just a minute ago. *Ad extra* means “to the outside” or “to the outside things” so that it is the divine activity outside of the Godhead. Now if we were speaking about the activity within the Godhead -- those of you who were here a couple of years ago when we studied the trinity -- you should be able to reply immediately why his activity within himself is his activity of generation. For example, his activity of inspiration, his activity of procession, that is, the sending of the Spirit, things like this. These are activities that take place within the trinity. But now we are talking about activity outside of the trinity when we talk about the Power of God. *Ad intra* activity is activity within the Triune Godhead. The triune distinctions and their intercommunion, and so, we are not talking about that. Divine power, when we talk about the power of God is an optional thing and eternal generation is not like creation. Creation is optional, providence is optional, and redemption is optional. But it is not optional with God to be triune. So we are talking about the things that have to do with the Power of God that are expressions of his will.

Second, it may be absolute or ordered. Now his absolute power is his power to do “anything” harmonious with his perfections. When we say, “God has absolute power,” we are saying that he is able to do anything that is in harmony with his perfections.

Theologians distinguish between absolute power and his ordinate or ordered power. His ordinate power is his ability to do whatever he decrees. His ordered power is the doing of his decrees. His absolute power is his ability to do anything that is harmonious with his perfections. A conflict, though, arose over it in the past, and a

certain group of philosophers, known as Nominalists, asserted that God could do absolutely everything -- in other words -- not simply everything that was harmonious with his perfections, but that he could do everything. Consequently, they said that he could sin. Further, that he could die. That he could change. He could do things that were, in themselves, self-contradictory.

Now their view implied by saying this that the natural attributes of God, that is his power, his omnipotence -- we’ll talk about that in a moment. His Power, his omnipotence, is more important than his holiness because it was possible to violate holiness in order to be able to do everything. So their view implied -- they did not say this -- that the natural attributes were more basic than the moral ones. In other words, “might” in God is more fundamental and absolute than “right.” That is the philosophy of many people in the society in which we live. Did not Mao Tse-tung say that, “Power lies at the end of a gun barrel”? And in the philosophy that Mao has exercised, “Might becomes right.” As a matter of fact, that really is the philosophy of the nations, isn’t it? “Might” is “right.” And that’s why we have the United States of America, and why the Indians are talking about civil rights now, because “might” is “right” in human society as a general rule.

One thing I liked about John F. Kennedy -- I must confess I hate to see this go out on tape, but I didn’t like too many things about J.F.K. but I did like this about him. He, occasionally, was very candid. And I can still remember when he was asked the question, why he wanted to be president. And what he replied.

Barry Goldwater was asked the question why he wanted to be president. And he said, “Well he wanted to be president because he felt that he had a lot of things that he could do for the country and he would be able to set things straight and that as a result of his presidency we would enjoy certain benefits,” and so on, like a typical politician -- I voted for Mr. Goldwater. But, nevertheless that’s what he said, he gave this long list of things that he thought he could do for the country.

But when John F. Kennedy was asked why he wanted to be president, he said, “Well it’s the place of power, isn’t it?” and so, he was very candid. That is precisely what he felt it was and that’s why he wanted it. He wanted to sit in the place of power.

And in human society, the place of power is generally the right place. So might is right. But now in spiritual things, that is not true. The Nominalists then asserted that God could do everything and if it involved the violation of some of the ethical or moral attributes of God, then the natural attributes took precedence over them.

Plato, Plotinus, Abelard, the Cartesian, Spinoza, Schleiermacher, and others on the other hand, said that God is able to do only what he actually does. And so we have two extremes. We have those who say God can do absolutely everything; he can even sin. He can even die. And then we have, on the other side; those who say, no, God can only do what he actually does.

Professor Emil Brunner, whose theology I’m reading at the present time, has this viewpoint. He feels that the idea of omnipotence is an idea that has really confused the Christian Church and that we should not think of omnipotence. We should, rather, think of God’s power to do what he wills, and that’s all. To do what he does.

Now, in the Bible, both of these extremes are avoided. In the Bible we are told that God is able to do everything that is harmonious with his nature; that is harmonious with his attributes. He cannot sin -- we’ll talk more about that later. But then on the other hand, the Bible says that he can do more than he actually does. He could do other things. And the Scriptures, I think, make both of these things plain.

For example, he “can” do things that he did not do. Matthew chapter 3, verse 9. Will you turn there with me for a moment? Matthew chapter 3, verse 9. John the Baptist is speaking, and he says, “Do not suppose that you can say to yourselves, we have Abraham for our father, for I say unto you that God is able from these stones to raise up stones children to Abraham.” And so God is able to do more than he does. He did not from these stones raise up children to Abraham, unless we take stones in the very

figurative, or symbolical, sense -- these stones of people who are standing round about; who were “dead” in their sins. It seems to me very plain that this text says that God could do this.

The Lord Jesus said that he was able to ask God and God was able to send Legions of Angels, but he did not do that. He is able to do things that he does not really do, but he has the power to do them.

On the other hand, he cannot do anything out of harmony with himself. And so, if someone should say to you “Are there things that God cannot do?” You say, “Yes.”

For example, in the Epistle of The Hebrews, says, in which two immutable things in which it is impossible for God to lie. And so God cannot lie. There are things that God cannot do. He’s able to do everything in harmony with his character. And he can do more than he actually does. So he can do everything in harmony with his character and, furthermore, he can do all possible things that are not out of harmony with his character.

Third, it is omnipotence. Our thoughts, our wills, our purposes, with certain acts of our bodies are within our power. I can say tonight when I go home I’m going to think about the goodness of God. I’m going to get my theological books on my desk and do a little reading and a little thinking. And so I can control my thoughts. I can even say tomorrow I’m going to go down to the theological seminary and I’m going to teach two classes. And so I exercise my will and that’s what I will do if I have the life and breath in order to do it.

My purposes are purposes, which I form. I hope under the guidance of the spirit, but they are my purposes. I’m able to form them. I can say, “Raise your hand.” I can say, “Lower your hand.” And other physical things, I have control of that. But I cannot “will” a book into being. I cannot say, “Be my theology.” I cannot will a bank account into existence. Wouldn’t that be a wonderful facility?

Now God can do all of these things without any effort. He can do whatever he “wills” without any means. Now these other things we can do with means. I can say, “I’m going to have a big bank account.” Then I go out and work, and if I have the ability, well I may have what I will. But God is able to do what he does without any effort, without any means.

Now that’s the highest conceivable idea of power. And in the Bible we call it omnipotence. He is able to do everything that he wills. And, further, he is able to do everything he is able. He is able to do everything possible providing it is not contrary to his being, his nature, his perfections, his attributes.

Now four: Its limitations. There are things though that he cannot do. And this is what I want to analyze. For a little while now, I think lots of times Christians are upset when people come up to them and stump them by saying there are things that God cannot do and how do you say then that God is all powerful.

In the first place, God cannot do things that are self-contradictory. A logical impossibility is that in, which the predicate is contradictory to the subject. They say, such and such is a contradictory thing. For example, one of the theologians says, “A material spirit.” Well the term “material” is contradictory to the term “spirit.” And so, consequently, a material spirit is a self-contradiction. A corporeal deity, that is, a deity in body, is self-contradictory. Of course, when we think of our Lord Jesus Christ, we have something that is unusual. But when we think of God, we’re thinking of God who is spirit and so we cannot say he is body. The spirit and body are opposed to one another.

If we were to say regarding a stone, Shedd says we cannot if we were to speak regarding a stone, we cannot say a “sensitive stone,” because a stone is by its nature, not sensitive. If we were to say, an irrational man, we are really saying something that is contradictory, because man is endowed with reason. Now we all know people who are irrational and it’s not in that sense that I use the term. But it is in the sense that man, by virtue of being a man, has a reasoning faculty. It is given to him. So we really -- when

we say irrational man -- we are saying something that is self-contradictory. And if we affirm it of some of our friends, we are insulting them, of course.

Or if we say, a square triangle, or a triangular square; we are saying something that is self-contradictory. If it’s a triangle it is not a square. If it’s a square it’s not a triangle. Or if we say, an honest politician [laughter], or if we say, a modest Texan [laughter]. All of these things are self-contradictory, the adjectives contradict the noun.

Professor Brunner then comments on the fact that, “We cannot then posit a God that can make the past not to have existed because the very fact that we say ‘the past’ we affirm that it has existed.” We cannot say that God cannot make what he does not make. We are affirming self-contradictory things about God. We cannot say that God could make something still better. Because the activities of God are perfect. We’ve talked about that before.

So God cannot do things that are self-contradictory. So when someone comes up to you and says, “Well can God do so and so.” You say, “No, that is a self-contradictory thing. That is a non-entity, that’s a nothing.”

Second, he cannot do things inconsistent with the nature and being of God. He cannot walk. If God could walk, he would have to be limited to a particular place and if he was limited to a particular place, he wouldn’t be “what?” Hmmm, not omniscient, he wouldn’t be omnipresent.

Can God sleep? Of course, the Bible says he neither slumbers nor sleeps, but that of course, is a figure in order to express the fact that he is always alive, but since he’s an immaterial spirit he cannot sleep. Sleep is something that pertains to a body.

Can God die? [Repeat] Can God die? No, God cannot die. I know what you say, “Well then, Jesus Christ died.” Yes, Jesus Christ did die. But you see, Jesus Christ was the “God-Man.” He was a divine person who possessed, in addition to his divine nature, a human nature. And it was in the sphere of his human nature that he gave up his life.

God cannot die. God, alone, has immortality. He is the Living One. What did we say about God when we were talking about his incommunicable attributes? The very first thing we said about him was that he was, “What?” Remember? Self-existent. Self-existent. He’s the one who is “I Am.” Always, “I Am.” Never anything but “I Am,” always continually existing from eternity to eternity. He never ceases to exist. He cannot die.

Of course, logically he couldn’t die either because it would be the greatest impotence to cease to live. If a person cannot control his own life, how can you say he is omnipotent? So the very fact that he is omnipotent means that he cannot die. Because death is the cessation of potency. So when a person dies, it’s cessation of potency that is, in this life. It may be accession of great potency in the life to come as I think it is.

Can God become non-existent? No. Since he is self-existent he cannot become non-existent.

One last question, can God change? No, he cannot change. Why can he not change? He is immutable. Right, I believe you’re learning some theology, just in spite of yourselves and the teacher.

Third, things inconsistent with the perfection of God. The Power of God is limited; he cannot do things inconsistent with the perfection of God. His perfections are his attributes. So he cannot do things that are inconsistent with his attributes. He cannot do things unbecoming his holiness. He cannot do things unbecoming his justice. He cannot do things that are unbecoming his goodness. Can he be tempted? Well let’s look at the Bible first and then I’ll say a word or two about it. James chapter 1, verse 13, James 1:13, “Let no one say when he is tempted, I am being tempted by God. For God cannot be tempted by evil. Or, of evil things and he himself does not tempt anyone.”

God cannot be tempted by evil. Why cannot God be tempted? Well, of course, he cannot be tempted by evil things because he is absolutely holy. Why cannot God be tempted to have something that he does not have? Why can he not? Well what does he

possess? He possesses everything. There is no motive whatsoever for him to desire anything, and so, a person who has everything, well, it’s impossible for him to be tempted. That would imply that he desires something that he does not have which would imply limitation on his part.

Well someone might say, “Well he might desire because he thought it was better than something he had.” But if he is the “infallible” God, and does not err, then, of course, he cannot make any mistakes like that.

Well if he cannot be tempted, can he sin? No, he cannot sin because if he were able to sin, he would not be perfect. A necessarily perfect being cannot be imperfect. We just cannot posit a necessarily perfect being, the Holy God, and then say he can be imperfect, which he would be.

Well can he lie? We’ve already looked at that text, but just turn back a few pages, I want you to see it with your two little, beautiful eyes. Chapter 6, verse 17 and 18 of The Epistle of the Hebrews. Hebrews chapter 6, verse 17 and verse 18. The author is talking about Abraham and how Abraham, by endurance, was urged to possess the promises. And we read in verse 17 -- some of you are having trouble finding the Book of Hebrews - - all you had to do was turn back to the book in front of James. It’s in the New Testament. “In the same way God desiring even more to show the heirs of the promise, the unchangeableness of his purpose interposed with an oath, in order that by two unchangeable things in which it is impossible for God to lie.”

You know in the Greek text there’s a great deal of stress upon the character of God here, because the term God in the Greek text does not have an article. And that type of construction lays a great deal of stress on the character of the noun and we could render it, just to get over the idea in which it is impossible for such a person as God to lie. In other words, by the very fact that he is God you cannot expect him to lie. So he cannot lie. He cannot deny himself.

Turn back a few more pages to 2 Timothy chapter 2, verse 11 through 13; Paul says -- page 326 in New American Standard Bible New Testament -- “It is a trustworthy statement, for if we died with him, we shall also live with him. If we endure we shall also reign with him. If we deny him, he also will deny us. If we are faithless, he remains faithful. For he cannot deny himself.”

God cannot do things then that are inconsistent with his perfections, with his attributes. So just as we said the past cannot become the present -- because that would be inconsistent and self-contradictory -- just as we said God cannot walk, or sleep, or die; so God cannot sin, he cannot lie, he cannot deny himself.

It would be weakness, not power, in God to make the past present. And it would be weakness in God, not power, if he could walk. It would be weakness, not power, if he could be tempted, or if he could sin, or if he could lie.

So if someone were to say to you, “Well if God can do everything, he ought to be able to lie.” Hah, but God is all-powerful. Yes. He’s all-powerful therefore he can lie. No, if he lies, then that is evident that he is not all-powerful. For it is a weakness to lie. It is a weakness to do these other things.

So we say then that God can do all that he wills. He can do also possible things that are not contrary to his nature. But he can do all that he wills.

Now if he can do all that he wills, then all we need to remember is that he can do all that he wills and his will is determined by his nature. Now if his nature is the nature of perfect holiness, then of course he can do all that he wills in holiness, and so on.

So his will is determined by his nature and consequently what he does is determined by what he is. That’s why he cannot sin. That’s why he cannot lie. That’s why he can do other things.

Now, you know, this is an interesting thing and it brings up, of course, the question of the human will again. And if you would just remember that “our” will and its relationship to “our” understanding, then inmost man is the same as God’s, then that will

help you. For he “wills” things that arise out of his nature. And his will is always determined by his nature. And so our will is determined by our nature. Consequently, the fundamental thing within man is not his will. That’s why the decision you make is not the fundamental thing in your life. The fundamental thing is what God does in your nature. That produces the decision of the will in a certain way.

I’ve listened to a lot of preaching. Almost all of it is bad on this point. And I’m getting up a message on God’s will, man’s will and free will. And someday I’m going to give that right here in this theology class. In fact it may be three messages. But I think this is one of the fundamental errors in evangelical Christianity. And this morning in DTS chapel -- now Dr. Blum is here -- I hate to say it in his presence because, well, I don’t mind really, Ed, saying it in your presence, but don’t go back and say I was just being very critical of Dallas Seminary, it was a visitor who came in and – tell it not in Gath, publish it not in Ashkelon – but he was a graduate of Dallas Theological Seminary, and so he got up and he gave us a very nice message, but at the end he, well -- I wrote it down. Always like these illustrations, you know, where I document them. And finally, he concluded with, “Well, it begins with us. We have to make up our own minds.”

And that’s the way he concluded. He was talking about the need for Christian love. Well it was a good exhortation on Christian love, but it just wound up on a false note. It does not really begin with us. We do not have to make up our own minds, as if that is the ultimate in Christian experience. We do have to make up our own minds. We do have a will. We do have to exercise our will. But you see our will is always exercised in accordance with our nature. And it is there that the decisions are really made. And that’s true of God.

Now I want to show you from the Bible that that’s true of God. He does everything that is in harmony with his nature and he will not do anything that is not in harmony with nature. And he wills what is in harmony with his nature. His will is not the final determining feature of the being of God.

Turn back to Ephesians chapter 1, now this is a good old text. And in this text we read, “Also -- Ephesians, Galatians, Philippians, Colossians, have we all gathered? I’m just kidding you tonight. You have it. “Also we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to his purpose.” We’re not going to talk about that, believe it or not. “Who works all things after the counsel of his will.”

Now notice “who works all things after the counsel of his will.” Now what is it that determines the action of God’s will? Why, his understanding, his wisdom, his counsel. He works all things after the counsel of his will -- somewhere I have a little projection -- I cannot write on it because there’s not enough space to write on -- but I’d like to write, “understanding which leads to will, which leads to power or action.” He works according to the counsel of his will. And so it is counsel, number one, his wisdom, his understanding -- I won’t distinguish between them just for the moment. His wisdom, his understanding leads to the will and he works in accordance with that.

And so we have understanding, which leads to will which leads to power or action. So, you see, God’s actions flow out of his will, which in turn flows out of his nature his understanding his, wisdom. Well that’s the same thing that happens in human nature. We will the things that flow out of what we are. And as I said before to you, because I like football, I say I’m going to the football game. And so my decision is determined by my wisdom, or lack of wisdom, as the case may be. So God then cannot do anything that is inconsistent with his perfections. He cannot do anything that is inconsistent with his nature, with his being.

You know we use this kind of thing, we use this kind of statement in human statements, and we say, ah, “Mary Johnson, why she couldn’t steal.” But now she can steal, so far as power is concerned. But when we make a statement like that we mean from what we know of her, from what we know of her nature, why she cannot steal. You often see in the detective mysteries on TV someone will say concerning a suspected murderer, “He could not kill.” Why, of course, he could kill, but from what this person

knows of that person and of his nature and character, he could not kill. So his action is determined by what he is. We recognize that occasionally. Well that’s true of God. Shedd says, “A being is rightly called omnipotent from doing what he wills not from suffering what he does not will.” And his willing arises out of his nature.

Now, finally, God cannot do things inconsistent with his decrees. Now, here of course, we have to do with his ordered power, his ordinate power, the things that he ordains. He cannot do anything inconsistent with his decrees. Now what do we mean by that? Well let’s just pose an illustration.

Let’s just say that God has created Adam and Eve. He has placed them in the Garden of Eden and Adam has now sinned and so has Eve. And “Man” has now fallen. Could God not destroy the world and begin over again after Adam sinned? Could he?

Could he? No. No, he could not. Why could he not? Now you were just looking at it from the standpoint of did he have the power to do it? Oh, yes, of course he had the power to do it. Absolute power. But what about his decrees?

Well, as a matter of fact, he had already elected Lewis Johnson before the foundation of the world. He couldn’t do that. What about Lewis Johnson? He’d be left high and dry, a non-entity. So you see, he had chosen before the foundation of the world and, consequently, after Adam sinned, he could not destroy the world, begin over again. He acts in accordance with his decrees. And so he cannot do anything inconsistent with his decrees.

So God is omnipotent. But there are limitations to his power. Now we have just a few more minutes. Roman II: The proof of the power of God. Now we’re going to only look very briefly at the logical proof, and then I will give you some of the Scripture references and we will conclude our study tonight with that.

Two sources of evidence, the proof of the power of God -- the logical proof. There seem to be two lines of evidence that we can point to -- there are probably other

lines of evidence. Charnock, in his book on the attributes gives three or four reasons why we can say that God is all-powerful. But I’m just selecting a couple of them.

First of all, infinite power is a logical necessity -- now I didn’t put that in the outline; you’ll have to put that down on your own paper. Infinite power is a logical necessity. The power in creation implies a greater and inconceivable power in the creator. He has the power of a seed, a little seed that produces a plant. He has the power of that seed. He has the power of all the seeds. He has the power of a beast. He has the power of a lion. He has the power of a tiger. He not only has the power of the lion and the tiger, but he has the power of all the lions, all of the tigers, all of the beasts together because he is the creator of them.

He has the power of a man; he has the power of a group of men. He has the power of an army of men. He has the power of all men. He has the power of an angel. He has the power of a troop of angels, of the heavenly hosts. He has all of this. And in the light of the fact that the Angels are called mighty in strength in Psalm 103, it’s not surprising that men have concluded that God is, therefore, all-powerful.

Charnock says, “He therefore communicates to the creature what power it hath contains imminently much more power in himself. He that teaches this man knowledge, shall he not know,” the Psalmist said, “So he that gives created beings power. Shall he not be powerful?” If he did not have this infinite power he would not be infinitely perfect, for a lack of power is a weakness. And so, from the logical standpoint then, we could reason that God is all-powerful.

Second, the miracles. The word of God seemed to indicate or point to that. He is able to make the sun stand still. He is able to stop the mouths of lions. He’s able to curb the power of fire. In fact, in the Bible it says in Psalm 136, verse 4, “To him who alone doeth great wonders.” I think it is reasonable to suppose that since he is an infinite being he possesses infinite power. Now the Scripture will prove his more significant so we will read a few verses as we close.

Genesis chapter 18, verse 14. Now that’s the text that we read earlier but let’s notice what it says. By the way, in Genesis chapter 17, we read, verse 1, “When Abram was ninety-nine years old, the Lord appeared to Abram and said to him, ‘I am God Almighty.’” Isn’t that an interesting title? “I am God Almighty”?

Now, when the Septuagint, the Greek Translation of the Old Testament renders this, it frequently renders it with, “I am God who has his hands on everything, who holds everything.” *Pantokator*; who “grasps” it all, almighty. Occasionally, it’s translated in the Old Testament as, the one who made all things. The one who is sufficient. It is translated sometimes, the Lord that is the covenant keeping God, the self-existent one, “I am God Almighty.”

The Vulgate, the Latin translation of the Old Testament made many hundreds of years ago renders it *omnipotens*. *Omnipotens*, from which we get, of course, the word omnipotent. And so, “I am God Omnipotent.” So the Latin translation has God saying to Abram, “I am God Almighty.”

The Hebrew scholars in tracing the root of *Al Shaddai*, which is the Hebrew expression that is used here, have traced it, some of them to the word that means, “to destroy.” He’s the God who destroys, or the God of strength, and thus he’s the “mighty” God. That seems to be the force of the term *chazaq* in the Old Testament in a passage like Joel 1. And there seems to be a play on the term there.

Most of our modern Hebrew scholars say that this probably comes -- or is related to the an Akkadian word, *shadou*, which means a mountain, and being a mountain, that came to mean the Lord overhead. And thus, the idea of the exalted God is contained within it.

At any rate, when he says, “I am God Almighty,” he is expressing the greatness of God and -- I think it is not stretching the language to say -- that the term “I am God Almighty” implies that he is the omnipotent God. And the Vulgate rendering is true to the force.

But let’s look at our text. Genesis 18, verse 14: “Is any thing too difficult for the Lord?” In other words, “Can he not do everything?”

Yes, he can do everything that is in harmony with his nature and being. And even things that are only possible, he is able to do. Numbers chapter 11, verse 22 and 23, Numbers 11:22 through 23 [Johnson comments to himself]. But Moses said, "The people, among whom I am, are 600,000 on foot; yet Thou hast said, 'I will give them meat, in order that they may eat for a whole month.' "Should flocks and herds be slaughtered for them, to be sufficient for them? Or should all the fish of the sea be gathered together for them, to be sufficient for them?" Now the LORD said to Moses, "Is the Lord's power limited? Now you shall see whether My word will come true for you or not." Should the Lord's power be limited? Chapter 11, verse 23.

Psalm 115, verse 3, “But our God is in the heavens; He does whatever He pleases.” Now what he pleases is his will. “He does whatever He pleases.” He does what he wills. And he wills in accordance with what he is. You might compare Psalm 135, verse 6 just as another verse in the Psalms. “Why the Lord does what he pleases, in the heaven and in the earth, in the seas and in all deeps.”

Now I think from this it becomes rather evident that Professor Brunner’s idea that God limits himself is not really true. There may be a partial sense in it, but we won’t go into that. Jeremiah chapter 32, verse 17. Jeremiah 32:17. Here the Prophet says,

“Ah Lord God! Behold, Thou hast made the heavens and the earth by Thy great power and by Thine outstretched arm! Nothing is too difficult for Thee.” “Nothing is too difficult for Thee.”

Matthew chapter 19, verse 26. Matthew 19:26 -- This is one of my favorite passages. The rich young ruler -- Jesus, after the interview and the rich young ruler went away grieved, he (Jesus) turned to his disciples and said, in verse 23, “Truly I say unto you, it’s hard for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven.” Guess that’s the only reason that I’m sorry I’m not a rich man. “And again I say unto you, It is easier for a

camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God.” And the disciples were very much puzzled by this because they thought that a man as imminently qualified, apparently qualified as the rich young ruler, should surely have been in that kingdom. So they say, “Who then can be saved?” And Jesus, looking upon them said, “With men this is impossible.”

You know this is the pre-Pauline Ephesians 2:8 and 9, “For by grace have you been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves.” With men, this is impossible. It is the gift of God and with God all things are possible, even saving a soul. Who then can be saved? Nobody. With men, but with God, all things are possible. And you’ll notice he does not talk about doing what he does only, but all things are possible to God, all things that are in harmony with his nature.

Luke chapter 1, verse 37 -- Matthew, Mark, Luke -- this is the passage of the Virgin birth. Now when I was preaching in San Diego about two weeks ago, I berated the congregation quite a bit because they didn’t know their theology. After all, I was only going to be there one weekend and so, I was able to say a lot of things and then fly out of town. And so I said a lot of things and flew out of town. And one of the things I said was that our evangelical Churches have forgotten theology and because they have forgotten theology and no longer think about theology, the ministry of the word is, generally speaking, a very superficial kind of ministry. And in the course of the exposition of a passage in Romans chapter 1, I made reference to the virgin birth of our Lord.

And I said that, biblically speaking, we probably should not have spoken of the virgin birth of our Lord as the doctrine taught in the New Testament, but the Virgin Conception of our Lord. Now I did not mean by that that to deny the fact that when our Lord was born Mary was still a virgin. As a matter of fact I have written and published words to that effect, that is, that she was still a virgin.

But what I was trying to stress was the fact that our Lord was supernaturally conceived, but his birth was like an ordinary birth. And thus, even in the experiences of his birth, if an infant were able to have any such experiences, his experiences were perfectly human.

So the miracle was in the conception not in the birth.

Well you can see that my congregation was not too used to theological distinction, so I got little letter back. And this brother is a very nice brother, he’s a preacher, that may seem self-contradictory, I know. [Laughter] But nevertheless, it’s true of him. He said, “Thank you again for the Christ exalting and edifying ministry at the Laurel Conference in San Diego. My soul was thrilled and blessed by your messages on Luke 24 and Romans 1 through 7.” We were unable to stay for the Lord’s Day. “I’m writing to ask you about something you said, relative to the virgin birth of our Lord Jesus. If I understand you correctly, you said you either did not believe or did not teach a virgin birth but rather a virgin conception” -- see he’s already got it wrong. [Laughter]

“I’ll confess I was mildly shocked but thought it was just a slip, and would have thought no more of it if had not others come to me about it. One brother, a long time teacher of some repute among assemblies was quite disturbed, as was another brother. As there will no doubt be others who may question me about it, I feel I should know if you intended to say this and if so, what was your meaning. Personally, I have no difficulty in believing in both a virgin conception and birth, and that Mary was a virgin until she and Joseph came together as husband and wife. Of course, in the eyes of man through either ignorance or unbelief, she would not be either but in the eyes of God and the faith she was indeed. It was a pleasure to meet you and hear from you.” And so on.

So you see when people are not used to theological ministry, the slightest little things that you say, they are lost in the sea of unfamiliarity and consequently, they don’t understand.

Now the virgin birth of our Lord -- I certainly believe in the virgin birth -- in the sense that Mary was a virgin when our Lord was born. But the miracle lay in the conception.

Now will you notice in verse 33, here we have the Annunciation by Gabriel and we read in verse 34 of chapter 1, “And Mary said to the angel, How can this be, since I am a virgin? And the angel answered and said to her, “The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you, and for that reason the holy offspring shall be called the Son of God.” In other words, it is in the conception that the Holy Spirit is at work. “And behold, even your relative, Elisabeth, has also conceived a son in her old age: and she was called barren and is now in the sixth month.” And to show that the angel knew that this was something that only God could do, he said, “For nothing shall be impossible with God.”

And by that very fact, the angel testifies to the fact that this virgin conception is something contrary to nature. So when theologians or when anybody else says, “Well we cannot accept the virgin birth because that’s -- or virgin conception -- because that’s contrary to nature and our Lord wouldn’t really be a true human.”

Well then you don’t believe it. It’s much better to believe the angel. He recognized that this was something that only God could do. It was unusual. It was supernatural. It was unique. And he adds that God is able to do it because he’s omnipotent. “Nothing shall be impossible with God.”

One last text, Romans chapter 1, verse 20 -- I’m one-minute over time, so I’ll just read this. The creation reveals both his eternal power and his divinity to the saved. To the unsaved, they look at it. They see it. They have the testimony. They don’t understand but they are without excuse. Paul says, verse 20, “For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes, His eternal power and divine nature.” “His eternal power, have been clearly seen, being understood through what has been made, so that they are without excuse.” “His eternal power,” God is all-powerful.

Now, next time, we want to look and see how this power is manifested in creation, in providence and, particularly, in redemption. Next Tuesday, the Lord willing. Let’s bow in prayer.

[Prayer] Father, we thank Thee for Thy Word. We thank Thee for the greatness of our God. Truly Lord, Thou alone doest wonders. And we worship Thee, the all-powerful omnipotent God, with whom nothing shall be impossible except that which is contrary to Thy nature, being attributes. Go with us as we go. For Jesus’ sake. Amen.