

Tapping into God's Power

written by Tim Jennings, M.D. | June 30, 2020



God is love, and God loves you.

He is the infinite source of all life, with unlimited power, and He longs to provide you with all the resources of heaven to enable you to live victorious over sin. The power of God is free and available to each and every one of us.

But many people struggle because they don't understand the difference between God's power and the power wielded by this sinful world. Satan tempts us to exchange the power of God for the power of the evil one. However, we can only receive and wield God's power as we relinquish worldly powers.

As we examine different types of power, we must consider what the power being wielded is meant to accomplish. For example, we use the power of a flame to heat our food on a gas range, but we would not use the power of a flame to treat a burn.

What is the power of God to be wielded and what is it meant to accomplish? In the plan of salvation, what is God's end-goal? The eradication of sin. But from where? The hearts and minds of people. But is that all God wants to accomplish, merely to eliminate sin? No, God could do that

by destroying all life. God seeks to not only eliminate sin but to save and heal sinners; He wants to restore in the heart, mind, soul of people His law, methods, principles, to bring us back into perfect unity, “at-one-ment,” with Him so that we can live again in His presence.

This means that God’s power must have the effect of turning people who war against Him, who don’t trust Him, who dislike Him, into people who love and trust Him and who live in harmony with His design for life—while retaining their unique individuality. So, as we think about the use of different types of power, we must ask the question: Does wielding this power heal hearts and minds, remove fear and selfishness, instill love and Christlike character—or does it inflame fear, selfishness, and a willingness to hurt others to protect self?

God wants our love, trust, loyalty, and devotion. As we examine the different types of power, we must ask: Will this power result in restoring love and trust in God?

Coercive Power

Coercive power is the use of force and might to threaten, intimidate, or punish in order to pressure someone who is otherwise unwilling to comply with your will. Can God get what He wants from His creatures by exercising this type of power? Further, is the use of this type of power reliable in recruiting followers to one’s cause?

Will the use of this type of power to obtain converts actually result in reliable, stable, trustworthy, and unshakable followers? Can one get loyalty by the use of threats? In other words, if you get people following you with coercive power, will they stay true and loyal against all opposition? What will break coercive power and cause such followers to collapse, to give in, to betray you?

- A bigger threat
- A desired inducement
- Believing a lie
- Genuine love for someone or something else
- The hope of freedom

Coercive power is a violation of God’s design law of liberty. Violate liberty in relationships and love is always damaged, a desire to rebel is instilled, and the individuality of those dominated is slowly eroded. This type of power does not restore God’s image in people but destroys it. This is the power of imposed law, rules that require external enforcement by a ruling authority—the power of all human governments.

Imposed law always results in the use of coercive power. God’s government does not operate upon coercive power because what God wants can never be achieved with it. God wants our love and trust—but one cannot achieve love and trust by threat and coercion. Thus, the Bible states, “not by might nor by power, but by the Spirit, says the Lord” (Zechariah 4:6).

The first type of power is coercive power, which originates in Satan’s government and is the primary method of the nations of this world. Such behavior is beastly! That is why Jesus said, “My

kingdom is not of this world” (John 18:36).

Inducing Power

The next type of power is inducing power—the power of bribes, payoffs, promotions, money, advancement, praise, and adoration. This power is also used by governments of this world—economic incentives, tax breaks etc. Will bribing someone achieve God’s goal of turning enemies into friends? Does this type of power result in reliable, stable, trustworthy, and unshakable followers? Will people who follow you for what they can get stay loyal against all opposition? What will cause them to collapse and betray you?

- A serious threat
- A better payoff
- A lie
- Genuine love for someone or something else

The movie *The Godfather* exemplifies how these first two types of power operate: A deal you can’t refuse—either take the payoff or you will be killed.

While there are rewards that result from loyalty to God—freedom from guilt and shame, the peace that friendship with God brings, the promise of eternal life—such rewards are not payoffs, inducements, or bribes, but the natural result of restoration to harmony with God and His design for life. Just as one cannot avoid the damaging results of violating the laws of health, *one cannot avoid the positive results of living in harmony with the laws of health*. And being healthy, having energy, vitality, and strength is a reward, but it is not a bribe.

Deceiving Power

Another type of power is the power of lies, deceit, and deception. The power of lies is a stronger power, a more potent power, and a more reliable power than coercion or inducement. Adherents who follow someone based on lies—if they truly believe those lies—will not be swayed by threats, will not be bought by bribes. Consider members of cults, for instance, or various terrorist groups. Sadly, human governments use this power all too frequently.

But while lies are more powerful and reliable in achieving converts than threats or inducements, will lies achieve God’s goal of winning people to love and trust? Will such followers be faithful beyond betrayal? Will those who follow based on lies remain true in the face of all opposition? What will cause the deceived follower to collapse and betray you?

- Another lie that they believe
- The truth—as the truth exposes the lies, if they accept the truth they will be set free! And the truth may be revealed by either facts or experiences of life
- Love for someone or something other than self

This power is one of Satan's prime powers. He is the father of lies. This power is never used by God.

The Power of Love

The power of love, to be loved and to love others genuinely more than self, is a power that moves people to action. We have all heard the heroic stories of persons who have sacrificed themselves to save family, friends, and even strangers. And God's love certainly draws us back to Him. But does the power of love result in reliable, stable, trustworthy, unshakable outcomes? Will those who follow based on love be loyal against all opposition?

Certainly, the power of love is greater than coercive force and greater than inducing power. But there is one power that can, and did, break the power of love—lies. Just remember Eden and the fall of our first parents.

To help people resonate with how powerful lies can be, I often use this example:

Imagine that you are in a healthy, loving marriage in which you love and trust your spouse, who loves and trust you in return. And someone you also love and trust, perhaps your brother or sister, comes to you with tears in their eyes and tells you a lie that your spouse is having an affair. They even show pictures they have doctored on their computer to make it appear your spouse is with another. Now, while it is not true, while your spouse is still loyal and faithful, *if you believe the lie*, does something inside of you change?

Notice the cascade of destruction that comes from believing lies:

- Lies believed break the circle of love and trust!
- Broken love and trust result in fear and selfishness
 - "I no longer trust you, so I have to watch out for myself."
- Fear and selfishness result in act of selfishness
 - "I'm afraid you will bring me a disease, so I'm moving out and going to the bank to get the money before you do."
- Acts of sin damage mind, body, relationships—a terminal condition
 - Increased fear activates stress cascades, damages health, causes negative thought processes and disrupts relationships

This is our root sin-condition. We are infected with fear and selfishness because our first parents believed lies. To the degree we continue to believe lies, particularly about God, we fuel fear and selfishness in our hearts and obstruct God's power to heal. This is why Jesus said, "If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples. Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free" (John 8:31, 32 NIV84). And this leads us to the power that cannot be broken, the true power of God.

The Power of Love *and* Truth

There is one power that cannot be broken, and that is the power of love combined with truth. Truth and love combined result in something impenetrable! This is why the Holy Spirit is known as the Spirit of truth and love. This is why at Pentecost they saw two streams of fire: the fire of truth and the fire of love. This is the power of the gospel—the good news—that Paul speaks about, “I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the *power* of God for the salvation of everyone who believes” (Romans 1:16 NIV84 emphasis mine). This is the truth about God, the good news about God and His character and methods of love, which destroy lies and win us back to trust.

Lies cannot defeat understood and experienced truth; fear cannot overcome love founded upon truth! Only those who are partakers of God’s nature of truth and love, which is received through the indwelling Spirit of truth and love, are transformed into beings who are unshakable. They are the sealed of God, those who are so settled into the truth and love of God in both understanding and experience that they cannot be moved.

We tap into this power by partaking of the truth about God found in His written Word, in our personal time with God, and in the study of God’s creation. As the Holy Spirit enlightens our minds with truth, if we want the power, we must accept and choose the truth. Mere cognitive acknowledgement does not tap into the power, it is the choice to embrace it and apply the truth to the life that brings the power. Then, as we trust God, we open our hearts and He pours His love into our hearts. This combined application of truth and love into hearts and minds achieves God’s goal: it transforms God’s enemies into God’s friends.

Restraining Power

I would be remiss if I didn’t mention one other use of power—restraining power. Restraining power is that force exercised to restrain, restrict, reduce, impede, slow, and/or obstruct injury, pain, suffering, destruction, and evil, primarily to give time for healing to occur.

Examples of restraining power include a parent restraining a child running toward the street; the Center for Disease Control officials implementing quarantine; mental-health professionals forcibly hospitalizing and medicating a psychotic patient; benevolent societies incarcerating those bent on exploiting others; and God holding back forces of evil to allow His healing plan to be realized.

Restraining power doesn’t change the character of the one being restrained, but it is the action of an outside intelligence inserting itself into the natural progression of events to overrule the autonomous choices of another being when that restraining power determines failure to act would result in unreasonable harm to others or *the one being restrained*. And restraining power uses the least restraint, for the shortest duration necessary, seeking to return the one restrained to full autonomy as soon as possible.

Love uses restraining power. God has used restraining power and continues to use restraining power, but what God cannot do is overwrite the mind and choices of His children. To do so would result in the destruction of individuality. The only way God can heal a person, restore a mind,

reconstruct a heart, is with the voluntary cooperation of that person. We must actively choose to cooperate with God, to agree with Him. We must “be fully persuaded in our own mind” (Romans 14:5) in order to be transformed. It is the only way that love and truth can heal and restore. Yet, because restraining power cannot transform the heart, there comes a time when restraining power lets go. Parents who restrain rebellious children know that at a certain age, parental restraint must be let go. The Bible speaks of a time when God lets go His restraint, when there is no more that He can do (Revelation 7:1-3; 22:11)

There is a terrible tension in the world today, including in the church, the tension between rules (coercive power) and truth and love, the tension between upholding institutions or saving souls. God is focused on saving people, not human institutions. I invite you to tap into the power of God by wielding the sword of truth in love.
