

POWER

“You seek to kill me . . . You are of your father, the devil, and the lusts of your father you will do” (John 8:40a,44a).

The lust for power is universal and deadly. The lust for power is subtle, yet is itself powerful and it easily controls us. We can never deal with matters we don't see or don't allow ourselves to see. We therefore need to understand what power is and does, so that we know to recognize it and then not only eschew it but despise it.

The world, controlled as it is by Satan, tempts us with a host of lusts. These few come immediately to mind: a lust for wealth, fame and power. There are other lusts too, such as for sex, for knowledge, for adventure, for comforts, and lots more. Of these, it's the lust for power that is most heinous because it seriously harms others. That's because the lust for power is a zero-sum project. This means that the one who gains power necessarily gets it at the expense of others. If I get more power, you get less.

Satan's primary sin in the Scriptures is pride, but the outworking of that pride is lust for power. Power over whom? Over God! If Satan accrues power, he supposes, God has less. So Satan's cosmic project is to get and exert power—his wicked power—in God's created world in the proud expectation he will rule the world instead of the Son. All existence, I would hazard, is a great power encounter. Creation is the stage, the platform, on which this power encounter occurs. . And we humans are involved in this deadly conflict. We are *necessarily* involved.

The Bible is notoriously efficient in its narration. It leaves out much that we would like to know about events. Everyone who reads and reflects on Scripture is left to wonder why such-and-such happened as it did. One relevant question that I have regarding the episode in the Garden is, Why did Eve offer the fruit to her husband? And I suspect that the answer is because she didn't only swallow a certain fruit, she swallowed the Serpent's lie: “You shall be as God.” What that means is this: God is powerful. He creates, He provides, He rules, He judges. So to be “as God” means having power. So (I'm supposing here) the woman, seeking power, gave the fruit to her husband so he would disobey God. She was exercising power—power not given to her by God. She was imitating Satan, lusting for power over others. Listening to Satan, we become like Satan and do as Satan does.

Pride isn't merely a character defect. Pride always expresses itself, and its most abhorrent expression is the exertion of power over others. The first two chapters of the Book of Job ooze with Satan's ugly pride and his attempt to defeat God. Satan's influence in the lives of Job's friends had them trying to overpower Job with their (wrong) moral philosophy. It was a power encounter in which Satan exerted his powers to force God to admit defeat. Job wasn't merely collateral damage, but the very focus of the power encounter and the agent whose will determined which supernatural being would be victorious. At the end, Job's faithfulness to God was vindicated by God's revelation of His power ultimately to defeat Satan.

Satan seeks autonomy, because that's the position of power. He wants to rule, which means exert his power. He seeks to control humanity, which is how he exerts power. So humans are the agents in this world who, by denying lust for power and embracing weakness in humility, enable God to defeat Satan. But, except for certain individuals named in Scripture, humanity failed. Proud humanity engaged in that same lust for autonomy, for power. The Son therefore had to become incarnate and enter humanity in order to defeat Satan on behalf of humanity. The Son had to obey God, which is an expression of humility. Humility is weakness. Humility repudiates power; it repudiates and defeats Satan. Voluntarily, selflessly, obediently going to a shameful, torturous death out of love for others repudiates the seeking of power and instead trusts in God.

Why are there wars? Pride and lust for power. Why do women seek to dominate their husbands, and to teach and preach in churches? Pride and lust for power. Why violence, cruelty, contempt for others and other such societal ills? Why are there conflicts in society? Why are there conflicts in *churches*? Why is the refusal to forgive others so extensive within Christianity? Why is there in today's Christianity such crass disobedience to the Word?

The answer is always the same: pride and lust for power. We crave autonomy. We want, as the Serpent put on offer, to be like God. That is, having *and exercising* power. If or when we exercise power, that empowers Satan in his war with God. It forces God to condemn the human creatures He loves.

Power isn't power unless it forces others to submit, to believe, think, or do what they otherwise would not. Thus "woke" is a lust for power. It illustrates how subtle the allure of power is. In essence, woke isn't merely a set of beliefs, but the *enforcement* of a set of beliefs, beliefs that are contrary to reason and to all experience. Woke says, for example, that a male can be a female and a female can be a male; and woe to the person who denies it. The very absurdity of it is intrinsic to the exercise of power. Yes, woke depends on groupthink, on personal ambition, and the fear of ostracism for it to succeed. Yet, the rapid spread and embrace of woke is mainly due to humanity being so vulnerable to Satan's offer of power and our sin nature's desire to have it and use it.

What does a stance of power look like today? "I disregard God's norms and standards because I have my own. I live according to my own lights, my own values, desires and interests. I regard the Scriptures as truth and as God-given, but they don't control me. I believe that God exists, that Christ died on the cross so I can have forgiveness of sins and not have to be in hell when I die. But this is my life and I'll live it as I please. I'll be the kind of person I want to be and I'll do what I want to do. God doesn't run my life, I do." Dear reader: In all these ways, we proudly live as a god, exerting god-like power.

Paul imitated the Lord Jesus by his life and by his teaching. So Paul taught a theology of weakness. By humble obedience to God, regardless what suffering comes to us because of it, we defeat our inherent, sinful lust for power. And there's no other way to do it. Merely making a profession of faith in Christ doesn't defeat Satan. It doesn't join God in His cosmic conflict with evil. Only humble, selfless, voluntary obedience to God does.

Some of Satan's power moves are overt to those aware of his existence. He seems to hide his power only from the unwitting. So Islam, Marxism (and other -isms), drugs, revolutions, wars, vengefulness, and mass shootings, for example, are clearly his doing. But most of Satan's power is exercised in secret. He whispers into our ears and we readily absorb—and then act on—his lies. Think of the Ananias and Sapphira episode! Think of Peter denying Jesus, thrice! He has the ability to deceive any of us so that we do something wrong (or fail to do something right) and thereby to embarrass and hurt God. He accuses us before God with gloating and boasting. We must be alert to his activities and strategies and resolve to oppose them. Or else we fail.

Life for us in this era is not meant to be a search for happiness, nor is it for self-fulfillment, as Satan wants us to believe, and so to ignore God's will and purposes. "Spiritual warfare" is not an abstract concept. Life for us is warfare! We're here, not merely to survive, not merely to defend ourselves, but to be on the offense, actively, *zealously* taking the side of God. We do that by imitating Jesus. The Holy Spirit and the Scriptures have been given to us to enable this. So we humbly obey God's Word without regard for the risks associated. We selflessly sacrifice ourselves for others. We expend ourselves practicing righteousness. We pursue holiness with passion and commitment. And we deliberately embrace weakness and dependence on God. Anything less is . . . well, surrender to Satan's power.

Dear reader, things are not what they seem. We fail to grasp the reality of the unseen realm. We moderns have created and locked ourselves into a secular, materialist worldview, one alien to that which is Scripture's. Satan is a personal, willful being whose domain is power. He's intent on using it for evil. And we're his target. In the future Messianic Kingdom, Satan and his minions will be sequestered, but they aren't that now. They're on the loose and they surround us. Let's therefore be not merely aware of Satan's existence but at work with Christ overcoming him. Let's live out a theology of weakness, to the glory of God.