

# POWER

*"Nearly all men can stand adversity, but if you want to test a man's character, give him power."*

\*Misattributed to Abraham Lincoln

"Nothing discloses real character like the use of power. It is easy for the weak to be gentle. Most people can bear adversity. But if you wish to know what a man really is, give him power..." Robert Ingersoll on Abraham Lincoln's character (Circa 1883 & 1895)

**1 Corinthians 2:1-5 KJV** And I, brethren, when I came to you, came not with excellency of speech or of wisdom, declaring unto you the testimony of God. (2) For I determined not to know any thing among you, save Jesus Christ, and him crucified. (3) And I was with you in weakness, and in fear, and in much trembling. (4) And my speech and my preaching was not with enticing words of man's wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power: (5) That your faith should not stand in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God.

**Revelation 13:4 KJV** And they worshipped the dragon which gave power unto the beast: and they worshipped the beast, saying, Who is like unto the beast? who is able to make war with him?

**Mark 1:22 KJV** And they were astonished at his doctrine: for he taught them as one that had authority, and not as the scribes.

## Definitions:

- **POWER:** dunamis (definitions from Webster's 1828 dictionary)

POW'ER, n. [The Latin has posse, possum, potes, potentia. The primary sense of the verb is to strain, to exert force.]

1. In a philosophical sense, the faculty of doing or performing any thing; the faculty of moving or of producing a change in something; ability or strength. A man raises his hand by his own power, or by power moves another body. The exertion of power proceeds from the will, and in strictness, no being destitute of will or intelligence, can exert power. Power in man is active or speculative. Active power is that which moves the body; speculative power is that by which we see, judge, remember, or in general, by which we think. Power may exist without exertion. We have power to speak when we are silent. Power has been distinguished also into active and passive, the power of doing or moving, and the power of receiving impressions or of suffering. In strictness, passive power is an absurdity in terms. To say that gold has a power to be melted, is improper language, yet for want of a more appropriate word, power is often used in a passive sense, and is considered as two-fold; viz. as able to make or able to receive any change.
2. Force; animal strength; as the power of the arm, exerted in lifting, throwing or holding.
3. Force; strength; energy; as the power of the mind, of the imagination, of the fancy. He has not powers of genius adequate to the work.
4. Faculty of the mind, as manifested by a particular mode of operation; as the power of thinking, comparing and judging; the reasoning powers.
5. Ability, natural or moral. We say, a man has the power of doing good; his property gives him the power of relieving the distressed; or he has the power to persuade others to do good; or it is not in his power to pay his debts. The moral power of man is also his power of judging or discerning in moral subjects.
6. In mechanics, that which produces motion or force, or which may be applied to produce it. Thus the inclined plane is called a mechanical power, as it produces motion, although this in reality depends on gravity. The wheel and axle, and the lever, are mechanical powers, as they may be applied to produce force. These powers are also called forces, and they are of two kinds, moving power, and sustaining power.
7. Force. The great power of the screw is of extensive use in compression. The power of steam is immense.
8. That quality in any natural body which produces a change or makes an impression on another body; as the power of medicine; the power of heat; the power of sound.
9. Force; strength; momentum; as the power of the wind, which propels a ship or overturns a building.
10. Influence; that which may move the mind; as the power of arguments or of persuasion.

11. Command; the right of governing, or actual government; dominion; rule, sway; authority. A large portion of Asia is under the power of the Russian emperor. The power of the British monarch is limited by law. The powers of government are legislative, executive, judicial, and ministerial. Power is no blessing in itself, but when it is employed to protect the innocent. Under this sense may be comprehended civil, political, ecclesiastical, and military power.

12. A sovereign, whether emperor, king or governing prince or the legislature of a state; as the powers of Europe; the great powers; the smaller powers. In this sense, the state or nation governed seems to be included in the word power. Great Britain is a great naval power.

13. One invested with authority; a ruler; a civil magistrate. Rom 13.

14. Divinity; a celestial or invisible being or agent supposed to have dominion over some part of creation; as celestial powers; the powers of darkness.

15. That which has physical power; an army; a navy; a host; a military force. Never such a power-- Was levied in the body of a land.

16. Legal authority; warrant; as a power of attorney; an agent invested with ample power. The envoy has full powers to negotiate a treaty.

17. In arithmetic and algebra, the product arising from the multiplication of a number or quantity into itself; as, a cube is the third power; the biquadrate is the fourth power.

18. In Scripture, right; privilege. John 1. 1 Cor 9.

19. Angels, good or bad. Col 1. Eph 6.

20. Violence, force; compulsion. Ezek 4.

21. Christ is called the power of God, as through him and his gospel, God displays his power and authority in ransoming and saving sinners. 1 Cor 1.

22. The powers of heaven may denote the celestial luminaries. Mat 24.

23. Satan is said to have the power of death, as he introduced sin, the cause of death, temporal and eternal, and torments men with the feat of death and future misery.

24. In vulgar language, a large quantity; a great number; as a power of good things. [This is, I believe, obsolete, even among our common people.]

Power of attorney, authority given to a person to act for another.

- **DEMONSTRATION**, n.

1. The act of demonstrating, or of exhibiting certain proof.
2. The highest degree of evidence; certain proof exhibited, or such proof as establishes a fact or proposition beyond a possibility of doubt, or as shows the contrary position to be absurd or impossible.
3. Indubitable evidence of the senses, or of reason; evidence which satisfies the mind of the certainty of a fact or proposition. Thus we hold that the works of nature exhibit demonstration of the existence of a God.
4. In logic, a series of syllogisms, all whose premises are either definitions, self-evident truths, or propositions already established.
5. Show; exhibition.
6. In anatomy, the exhibition of parts dissected.

- **AUTHORITY**, n. [L. auctoritas.]

1. Legal power, or a right to command or to act; as the authority of a prince over subjects, and of parents over children. Power; rule; sway.
2. The power derived from opinion, respect or esteem; influence of character or office; credit; as the authority of age or example, which is submitted to or respected, in some measure, as a law, or rule of action. That which is claimed in justification or support of opinions and measures.
3. Testimony; witness; or the person who testifies; as, the Gospels or the evangelists are our authorities for the miracles of Christ.
4. Weight of testimony; credibility; as a historian of no authority.
5. Weight of character; respectability; dignity; as a magistrate of great authority in the city.
6. Warrant; order; permission. By what authority dost thou these things. Mat 21. Acts 9.
7. Precedents, decisions of a court, official declarations, respectable opinions and says, also the books that contain them, are call authorities, as they influence the opinions of others; and in law, the decisions of supreme courts have a binding force upon inferior courts, and are called authorities.
8. Government; the persons or the body exercising power or command; as the local authorities of the states. In Connecticut, the justices of the peace are denominated the civil authority.

## **Questions:**

1. What are some characteristics of power?
2. How is power obtained?
3. How is power demonstrated? In deeds? Examples in Scripture?
4. What are some characteristics of individuals who hold/have power?
5. How can the tendency of power to corrupt be mitigated?
6. Conversely, how does power tend to be fed?
7. How have you seen power corrupted? Diminished?
8. How have you seen power used in a godly way?

*Lord Acton (1887) to Bishop Creighton regarding how church historians should record the deeds of popes who committed atrocities in response to the idea that popes and kings should be judged differently than other men.*

"I cannot accept your canon that we are to judge Pope and King unlike other men, with a favourable presumption that they did no wrong. If there is any presumption it is the other way against holders of power, increasing as the power increases. Historic responsibility has to make up for the want of legal responsibility. Power tends to corrupt and absolute power corrupts absolutely. Great men are almost always bad men, even when they exercise influence and not authority: still more when you superadd the tendency or the certainty of corruption by authority. There is no worse heresy than that the office sanctifies the holder of it. That is the point at which the negation of Catholicism and the negation of Liberalism meet and keep high festival, and the end learns to justify the means. You would hang a man of no position, like Ravallac; but if what one hears is true, then Elizabeth asked the gaoler to murder Mary, and William III ordered his Scots minister to extirpate a clan. Here are the greater names coupled with the greater crimes. You would spare these criminals, for some mysterious reason. I would hang them, higher than Haman, for reasons of quite obvious justice; still more, still higher, for the sake of historical science."