

Call to Obedience #295
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The Power of Restraint

By Reimar Schultze

“For this cause we also...do not cease to pray for you...that ye might...be strengthened with all might, according to his glorious power, unto all patience and longsuffering with joyfulness” (Col. 1:9-11).

Let me begin by asking you this: What glorious power was it that the apostles experienced at Pentecost which they did not experience before? Was it the casting out of devils? No. Was it the healing of the sick? No. Was it in the prophesying, the power to preach? No.

All of the twelve, including Judas the traitor—thief and liar—experienced what is so commonly called “Pentecostal power” before Pentecost, for Matthew says:

“And when he had called unto him his twelve disciples, he gave them power against unclean spirits; to cast them out, and to heal all manner of sickness and all manner of disease” (Matt. 10:1).

Think of it: the apostles had power to heal all diseases and to cast out “*all devils*” (Luke 9:1). That was before Pentecost. But because they were not yet filled with the Holy Spirit, they quarreled among themselves as to who was the greatest. They still had hearts that were hard. They still coveted the best seats. They still had a spirit of anger, expressed particularly when they asked Jesus for permission to bring fire down to burn up the unbelieving Samaritans (Luke 9:52).

And, perhaps now, you can see why Jesus did not allow these apostles to be on the road casting out devils and healing diseases for a very long time. It was because their spirit was not anything like his spirit. And so he pulled them back in, and he significantly dampened their excitement over this power to cast out and to heal when he said unto them, “*Notwithstanding, in this rejoice not, that the spirits are subject unto you; but rather rejoice, because your names are written in heaven*” (Luke 10:19–20).

The apostles were excited about the power over devils and sickness because it made them look good to the people, and it drew people to them so they would also hear the gospel. But Jesus was not so excited about this pre-Pentecostal display of power.

Jesus knew too well that these twelve quarrelsome, self-seeking, revengeful, power-hungry disciples were still totally unlike him. It is evident that this pre-Pentecostal power to heal and cast out devils made the apostles not one iota more like Jesus. Had these men been tested, tempted, and tried by the devil, as Jesus was for forty days, they would have flunked nearly all of the tests. They would have used their power to turn stones into bread, to take over the kingdoms of the world, and cast themselves off the pinnacle of the temple to have angels catch them in their hands.

The twelve, when given power, knew only one thing: use it! When given opportunity, they knew only one thing: take it! No wonder Jesus called two of them “*The sons of thunder*” (Mark 3:17), for thunder does nothing but scare everybody, and it is preceded by destructive lightning.

Having the power to cast out all devils and heal all manner of disease is absolutely no indication that we are anything at all like Jesus. It is no proof whatsoever that we have been tempted, tried, and tested, for our Lord said:

“Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? and in thy name have cast out devils? and in thy name done many wonderful works? And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity” (Matt. 7:22–23).

Yes, even the Egyptian sorcerers had power to turn their rods into serpents, to turn water into blood, and to bring frogs up out of the Nile!

Pentecostal power! I ask again: Since it was not the power over devils and sickness, what *“glorious power”* was it that the apostles experienced at Pentecost which wasn’t experienced before?

My friend, **at Pentecost, the apostles received the power to be like Jesus!** It is, among other things, the power not to use the power! We can also say that it is the power not to abuse power!

It is the power not to turn stones into bread nor to take over kingdoms, and it is the power to resist the dramatic. It is the power not to call fire from heaven. It is the power to walk on water only once and then only to be seen by the inner circle. It is the power not to do a miracle to prove a point to the opposition. It is the power not to defend ourselves but to be led as a dumb sheep to the slaughter. It is the power to live in material poverty when one could have his disciples fishing all day and night to pull thousands of dollars worth of coins out of the Sea of Galilee. It is the power to keep a thief as the treasurer of the board for three years. It is the power not to do anything except the Father’s will.

It is the power to live with a lamb spirit rather than a lion spirit. It is the power to love when hate and resentment seem more appropriate, to suffer rather than to retaliate, to become nothing rather than something, to seek the lowest seat rather than the highest, and to take no glory upon oneself.

That is Pentecostal power! It is to become like Jesus, to be tried and tested and not to be found wanting. This true power is not to abuse power for one’s own glory but to restrain one’s own power for God’s glory.

Before Pentecost, the apostles had only one concept of power: use it. At Pentecost, they received power not to use it. Before Pentecost, they used their power to barge through the enemy’s open doors. After Pentecost, they left most open doors unused because they realized that, in most all cases, “open doors” are nothing but beautifully decorated, hidden traps of the devil.

Ah, my friends, this is the power, the *“glorious power”* Paul and Epaphras tried to pray onto the Colossian Christians, *“That ye might be...strengthened with all might, according to his glorious power, unto all patience and long suffering with joyfulness.”*

The apostles had raw power before Pentecost, but they did not have *“glorious power”* until Pentecost. It is this glorious power that Paul also speaks about when he says, *“But we all with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord”* (2 Cor. 3:18).

So, one of the most hidden characteristics of God is his glorious power of restraint, the power *“unto all patience and longsuffering with joyfulness.”*

Oh, how the disciples needed that hidden power of God. How all Christians needed that in those early days of unmerciful imprisonments and slaughters. How we need it today for daily living, that we men will not rule over our wives as tyrants nor we pastors rule over our churches as dictators. Without that glorious power, we become like lions, so much like the devil, pushing and driving and manipulating and demanding, and exploiting everyone’s resources. But with this power of Pentecost, we become more and more like a lamb: the Lamb of God which takes away the sins of the world.

And here, then, is that startling difference between God and the devil. God hardly ever uses his power. He sits on his majestic throne, a picture of perfect tranquillity. Considering his omnipotence, God hardly ever raises his finger. But the devil never sits. Rather, as Job says, he goes to and fro on the earth, and up and down in it, using all the power at his disposal (Job 1:7).

Indeed, God sits, but the devil is ever on the move. In fact, the devil has neither throne nor chair to sit on. He is condemned to a restless frenzy of activities forever. While God's power of restraint exceeds his power to act, the devil's power to act, by far, exceeds his power of restraint. Therefore, he is out of control, and wherever you see power out of control, you know the devil is not far away.

From this, we make the following observation from history. What distinguishes the best men from the worst is this: for the best men, the power of restraint always exceeds their power to do. However, the worst men's power to do always exceeds their power not to do.

We saw this restless, unrestrained power in Joseph Stalin's murder of millions of his own citizens and in Adolf Hitler's destruction of most of Central Europe. We saw it in Napoleon and Alexander the Great. They were men who used all their powers ruthlessly, ever destroying, just like the devil.

Moses, David, and Jesus, on the other hand, were men whose power not to do always exceeded their power to do. Oh, the power that Jesus had—yet, how little he used it.

What would you do had you the power of the Lord? Would you wait 4,000 years from the time you promised the Messiah until you would bring him into the world? Would you allow Abraham to wait 20 years before you would give him his promised son? Would you let David be chased around the mountains like a wild dog for seven years before you would give him the throne? Would you let Anna pray 80 years, or would you have said to her after ten years of prayer, "I have heard your prayer. Go and get married, and live a normal life"?

If you had the omnipotent power of God, would you have walked on water just once or, perhaps, every time your enemies and followers questioned your calling? Had you this power, would you have allowed tens of thousands of Christians to be martyred, torn apart by wild beasts, burned at the stake, and crucified? Would you have allowed the merciless killing of six million Jews in concentration camps in Germany and Poland? Would you have allowed a nuclear bomb to fall on Hiroshima to destroy thousands of innocent citizens and maim other thousands for life?

My friend, enough of that! Let's face it, the most hidden characteristic of those who really have divine power is that they hardly ever put it to use, except inwardly to be changed more and more into his glory.

So, wherever you see much bragging about power, wherever you see a lot of frantic religious activity, it is likely that you will see there very little of Jesus. But where there is rest, sweetness, *"patience, and longsuffering unto joyfulness,"* there you will find, over and over again, my dear Savior in his beauty.

Yes, you have the power to...! But don't you think it's time to apply now for the power not to...?!

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