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John Gill's

A BODY OF DOCTRINAL DIVINITY

Book 1—Chapter 8

OF THE OMNIPOTENCE OF GOD.

Some of the names of God, in the Hebrew language, are thought to be derived from words which signify firmness and stability, strength and power; as Adonai, El, El-Shaddai, which latter is always rendered almighty, (Gen. 17:1; Ex. 6:3) and very frequently in the book of Job; and the Greek word παντοκρατωρ is used of God in the New Testament, and is translated almighty and omnipotent, (Rev. 1:8, 4:8, 19:6) and power is one of the names of God, (Matthew 26:64 compared with Heb. 1:3) the angel said to the Virgin Mary, "with God nothing shall be impossible", (Luke 1:37) and Epicharmus, the heathen, has the same expression; and so Linus: Omnipotence is essential to God, it is his nature; a weak Deity is an absurdity to the human mind: the very heathens suppose their gods to be omnipotent, though without reason; but we have reason sufficient to believe that the Lord our God, who is the true God, is Almighty; his operations abundantly prove it; though if he had never exerted his almighty power, nor declared it by any external visible works, it would have been the same in himself; for it being his nature and essence, was from eternity, before any such works were wrought, and will be when they shall be no more; and hence it is called, his "eternal power", (Rom. 1:20) and may be concluded from his being an uncreated eternal "Spirit". All spirits are powerful, as their operations show; we learn somewhat of their power from our own spirits or souls, which are endowed with the power and faculties of understanding, willing, reasoning, choosing and refusing, loving and hating, &c. and not only so, but are able to operate upon the body; and to quicken, move, direct and guide it to do whatever they please, and that that is capable of; and angelic spirits are more powerful still, they excel in strength, and are called mighty angels, (Ps. 103:20; 2 Thess. 1:7) and have done very strange and surprising things; one of them slew in one night one hundred and eighty five thousand men, in the Assyrian camp, (2 King 19:35) and what then cannot God, the uncreated and infinite Spirit, do; who has endowed these with all their power,

might, and strength? can less than omnipotence be ascribed to him? This may be inferred from his "infinity". God is an infinite Being, and so is every perfection of his; his understanding is infinite, and such is his power; for, as a Jewish writer argues, since power is attributed to God, it must be understood that it is infinite; for if it was finite, it might be conceived that there was a greater power than his; and so privation would fall on God; as if there was not in him the greater power that is to be conceived of. He is unlimited and unbounded, as to space, and so is omnipresent; and he is unlimited and unbounded as to time, and so is eternal; and he is unlimited and unbounded as to power, and so is omnipotent: to deny, or to call in question, his omnipotence, is to limit the Holy One of Israel, which ought not to be done; this the Israelites are charged with, for distrusting his power to provide for them in the wilderness (Ps. 78:19, 20, 41). The omnipotence of God may be argued from his "independency"; all creatures depend on him, but he depends on none; there is no cause prior to him, nor any superior to him, or above him, that can control him; none, who, if his hand is stretched out, can turn it back, or stop it from proceeding to do what he will; none can stay his hand, or say unto him, what dost thou? "he does what he pleases in heaven and in earth" (Dan. 4:35). Moreover, this attribute of God may be confirmed by his "perfection"; God is a most perfect being; but that he would not be if anything was wanting in him: want of power in a creature is an imperfection, and would be so in God, was that his case; but as he is great, his power is great; there is an exuberance, an exceeding greatness of power in him, beyond all conception and expression; he is "able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we can ask or think" (Eph. 1:19 3:20). And this may be strengthened yet more by observing the "uselessness" of many other "perfections" without it; for what though he knows all things fit and proper to be done, for his own glory, and the good of his creatures, what does it signify, if he cannot do them? and though he may, in the most sovereign manner, will, determine, and decree, such and such things to be done; of what avail is it if he cannot carry his will, determinations, and decrees into execution? what dependence can there be upon his faithfulness in his promises, if he is not able also to perform? and of what use is his goodness, or an inclination and disposition in him to do good, if he cannot do it? or where is his justice in rendering to every man according to his works, if he cannot execute it? So that, upon the whole, it is a most certain truth, that "power belongs to God", as the Psalmist says, (Ps. 62:11) and to whom he ascribes it, even "power" and "might", by which two words he expresses the greatness of power, superlative power, power in the highest degree, even omnipotence, (1Chron. 29:12) and it may be observed, that in all the doxologies or ascriptions of glory to God, by angels and men, power or might is put into them (Rev. 4:10,11, 5:13, 7:11,12). And indeed it belongs to no other; it is peculiar to God: nor is it communicable to a creature; since that creature would then be God; for omnipotence is his nature; nor is it even communicable to the human nature of Christ, for the same reason; for though the human nature is united to a divine person, who is omnipotent, it does not become omnipotent thereby; though the two natures, divine and human, are closely united in Christ; yet the properties of each are distinct and peculiar; and it is easy to observe, that the human nature of Christ was subject to various infirmities, though sinless ones, and stood in need of help, strength, and deliverance; for which, as man, he prayed; and

at last, he was crucified, through weakness (Heb. 4: 15; Ps. 22:19, 20; 2 Cor. 13:4). And as for Matthew 28:18 that is said not of the attribute of divine power, which is not "given" him, but is natural to him, as a divine person, but of his authority over all, and their subjection to him as Mediator.

The power of God reaches to all things, and therefore is, with propriety, called Omnipotence; all things are possible with God, and nothing impossible; this is said by an angel, and confirmed by Christ, (Luke 1:37; Mark 14:36) what is impossible with men is possible with God; what cannot be done according to the nature of things, the laws, rules, and course of nature, may be done by the God of nature, who is above these, and not bound by them, and sometimes acts contrary to them; as when he stopped the sun in its course, in the times of Joshua; made iron to swim by the hands of the prophet Elisha; and suffered not fire to burn in the furnace of Nebuchadnezzar, so that the three persons cast into it were not hurt by it, nor their clothes so much as singed, nor the smell of fire upon them: whereas, it is the nature of the sun to go on in its course, without stopping, nor can any creature stop it; and for ponderous bodies, as iron, to sink in water; and for fire to burn. There are some things, indeed, which God cannot do, and which the Scriptures express as, that "he cannot deny himself", (2 Tim. 2:13) nor do anything that is contrary to his being, his honour and glory, or subversive of it; thus, for instance, he cannot make another God, that would be contrary to himself, to the unity of his Being, and the declaration of his Word; "Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God is one Lord", (Deut. 6:4) he cannot make a finite creature infinite; that would be to do the same, and there would be more infinites than one, which is a contradiction; he cannot raise a creature to such dignity as to have divine perfections ascribed to it, it has not, which would be a falsehood; or to have religious worship and adoration given it, which would be denying himself, detracting from his own glory, and giving it to another, when he only is to be served and worshipped: in such manner it is also said of him, that he "cannot lie", (Titus 1:2; Heb. 6:18) for this would be contrary to his truth and faithfulness; he can do nothing that is contrary to his attributes; he cannot commit iniquity, he neither will nor can do it; for that would be contrary to his holiness and righteousness; (see Job 34:10,12, 36:23) he cannot do anything that implies a contradiction; he cannot make contradictions true; a thing to be, and not to be at the same time; or make a thing not to have been that has been; he can make a thing not to be, which is, or has been; he can destroy his own works; but not make that not to have existed, which has existed; nor make an human body to be everywhere; nor accidents to subsist without subjects; with many other things which imply a manifest contradiction and falsehood: but then these are no prejudices to his omnipotence, nor proofs of weakness; they arise only out of the abundance and fulness of his power; who can neither do a weak thing nor a wicked thing, nor commit any falsehood; to do, or attempt to do, any such things, would be proofs of impotence, and not of omnipotence.

The power of God may be considered as absolute, and as actual or ordinate. According to his absolute power, he can do all things which are not contrary to his nature and perfections, and which does not imply a contradiction; even though he

has not done them nor never will: thus he could have raised up children to Abraham out of stones, though he would not; and have sent twelve legions of angels to deliver Christ out of the hands of his enemies; but did not (Matthew 3:9, 26:53). He that has made one world, and how many more we know not for certainty, (Heb. 11:3) could have made ten thousand; he that has made the stars in the heaven innumerable, could have vastly increased their number; and he that has made an innumerable company of angels, and men on earth, as the sand of the sea, could have added to them infinitely more. The power of God has never been exerted to its uttermost; it is sufficient to entitle him to omnipotence, that he has done, and does, whatsoever he pleases, and that whatsoever is made, is made by him, and nothing without him; which is what may be called, his ordinate and actual power; or what he has willed and determined, is actually done; and of this there is abundant proof, as will appear by the following instances.

1. In creation; the heaven, earth, and sea, and all that in them are, were created by God, is certain; and these visible works of creation are proofs of the invisible attributes of God, and particularly, of his "eternal power" (Acts 4:24; Rom. 1:20). Creation is making something out of nothing; which none but omnipotence can effect; (see Heb. 11:3) no artificer, though ever so expert, can work without materials, whether he works in gold, silver, brass, iron, wood, stone, or in anything else: the potter can cast his clay into what form and figure he pleases, according to his art, and make one vessel for one use, and another for another; but he cannot make the least portion of clay: but God created the first matter out of which all things are made; and which were made out of things not before existing by the omnipotent Being; whom the good woman animating her son to martyrdom, exhorted to acknowledge, in the Apocrypha:

“I beseech thee, my son, look upon the heaven and the earth, and all that is therein, and consider that God made them of things that were not; and so was mankind made likewise.” (2 Maccabees 7:28)

Nor can any artificer work without tools; and the more curious his work, the more curious must his tools be: but God can work without instruments, as he did in creation; it was only by his all commanding word that everything sprung into being, (Gen. 1:3; Ps. 36:9) and everything created was done at once; creation is an instantaneous act, is without succession, and requires no length of time to do it in; everything on the several days of creation were done immediately: on the first day God said, "Let there be light"; and it immediately sprung out of darkness: on the second day he said, "Let there be a firmament", an expanse; and at once the airy heaven was stretched out like a curtain around our earth: on the third day he said, "Let the earth bring forth grass, herbs, and fruit trees"; and they arose directly out of it, in all their greenness and fruitfulness: on the fourth day he said, "Let there be lights in the heavens"; and no sooner was it said, but the sun, moon, and stars, blazed forth in all their lustre and splendour: on the fifth and sixth days orders were given for the waters to bring forth fish, and fowl, and beasts, and cattle of every kind; and they accordingly brought them forth in full perfection immediately; and

last of all, man was at once made, complete and perfect, out of the dust of the earth, and the breath of life was breathed into him: and though there were six days appointed, one for each of these works, yet they were instantaneously performed on those days; and this time was allotted not on account of God, who could have done them all in a moment; but for the sake of men, who, when they read the history of the creation, there is a stop and pause at each work, that they may stand still and meditate upon it, and wonder at it. Whereas the works of men require time; and those that are most curious, longer still. Add to all this, that the works of creation were done without weariness; no labour of men is free from it: if it be the work of the brain, the fruit of close reasoning, reading, meditation, and study; "much study", the wise man says, "is a weariness of the flesh", (Eccl. 12:12) or if it be manual operation, it is labour and fatigue; but the everlasting God, the Creator of the ends of the earth, though he has wrought such stupendous works, "fainteth not, neither is weary", (Isa. 40:28) and though he is said to rest on the seventh day, yet not on account of fatigue; but to denote he had finished his work, brought it to perfection, and ceased from it. And now, to what can all this be ascribed but to omnipotence? Which,

2. Appears in the sustaining and support of all creatures, in the provision made for them, with other wonderful works done in providence: all creatures live, move, and have their being in God; as they are made by him, they consist by him; "he upholds all things by the word of his power"; the heavens, the earth, and the pillars thereof, (Acts 17:28; Col. 1:16,17; Heb. 1:3; Ps. 75:3) which none but an almighty arm can do: and the manner in which the world, and all things in it, are preserved, and continue, is amazing and surprising, and cannot be accounted for, no other way than by the attribute of omnipotence; for "he stretcheth out the north over the empty place, and hangeth the earth upon nothing; he bindeth up the waters in his thick clouds, and the cloud is not rent under him"; though these are no other than condensed air, which carry such burdens in them, and yet are not burst by them--he has "shut up the sea with doors"; with cliffs and rocks, and even with so weak a thing as sand; "and said, hitherto shalt thou come, and no further, and here shall thy proud waves be stayed--and has caused the dayspring to know its place--divided a watercourse for the overflowing of waters, and a way for the lightning of thunder, to cause it to rain on the earth"; which none of the vanities of the Gentiles can do; he gives that "and fruitful seasons, filling mens' hearts with food and gladness", and provides for all the fowls of the air, and "the cattle on a thousand hills"; (see Job 26:7, 8, 38:10-12, 25, 26; Acts 14:17). But what hand can do all these but an almighty one? To which may be added, those wonderful events in providence, which can only be accounted for by recurring to omnipotence, and to supernatural power and aid; as the drowning of the whole world; the burning of Sodom and Gomorrah, and the cities of the plain; the strange exploits of some particular persons, as Jonathan and David; the amazing victories obtained by a few over a multitude, sometimes by unarmed men, sometimes without fighting, and always by him that helps, whether with many, or with them that have no power, as the cases of Gideon, Jehoshaphat, and Asa show; with various other things too numerous to mention, as

the removing of mountains, shaking the earth, and the pillars of it, commanding the sun not to rise, and sealing up the stars, (Job 9:5-7 etc.

3. The omnipotence of God may be seen in the redemption of men by Christ, in things leading to it, and in the completion of it: in the incarnation of Christ, and his birth of a virgin, which the angel ascribes to "the power of the Highest", the most high God, with whom "nothing is impossible", (Luke 1:35, 37) and which was an expedient found out by infinite wisdom, to remove a difficulty which none but omnipotence could surmount, namely, to bring "a clean thing out of an unclean"; for it was necessary that the Saviour of men should be man, that the salvation should be wrought out in human nature, that so men might have the benefit of it; and it was necessary that he should be free from sin, who became a sacrifice for it; yet how it could be, since all human nature was defiled with sin, was the difficulty; which was got over, through omnipotence forming the human nature of Christ in the above manner: and which was also evident in the protection of him from the womb; in his infancy, from the malice of Herod; after his baptism, from the violence of Satan's temptations, who put him upon destroying himself; and from the wild beasts of the wilderness; and from all the snares and attempts of the Scribes and Pharisees, to take away his life before his time: and in the miraculous works wrought by him, which were proofs of his Messiahship; such as causing the blind to see, the deaf to hear, the dumb to speak, the lame to walk, and cleansing lepers, and even raising the dead to life; and which were such instances of omnipotence, as caused in those that saw them amazement at the mighty power of God, (Matthew 11:5; Luke 9:43) and more especially this might be seen in making Christ, the man of God's right hand, strong for himself; in strengthening him in his human nature to work out salvation, which neither men nor angels could have done, by fulfilling the law, and satisfying justice; in upholding him under the weight of sins and sufferings; in enabling him to bear the wrath of God, and the curses of a righteous law, and to grapple with all the powers of darkness, and to spoil them, and make a triumph over them; and in raising him from the dead for justification; without which salvation would not have been complete; and in which "the exceeding greatness of" the divine "power" was exerted; and whereby Christ was declared to be the Son of God "with power" (Eph. 1:19; Rom. 1:4).

4. Almighty power may be discerned in the conversion of sinners; that is a creation, which is an act of omnipotence, as has been proved. Men, in conversion, are made new creatures; "created in Christ, and after the image of God"; have new hearts and spirits, clean and upright ones, created in them; new principles of grace and holiness formed in them; "are turned from darkness to light, from the power of Satan unto God; and are made willing in the day of God's power" upon them, to be saved by Christ, and serve him; to submit to his righteousness, and to part with their sins and sinful companions: all which are effects of the exceeding greatness of the power of God towards them and upon them: they are quickened when dead in sins, and raised by Christ the resurrection and the life, from a death of sin to a life of grace; the Spirit of life enters into them, and these dry bones live; conversion is a resurrection, and that requires almighty power. And if we consider the means of it,

generally speaking, "the foolishness of preaching", the gospel put into earthen vessels, for this end, "that the excellency of the power of God may appear to be of God", and not of men; and when these means are effectual, they are "the power of God unto salvation" (2 Cor. 4:7; Rom. 1:16). And also the great opposition made to this work, through the enmity and lusts of mens' hearts, the malice of Satan, willing to keep possession; the snares of the world, and the influence of wicked companions; it cannot be thought to be any thing short of the omnipotent hand of God, that snatches men, as brands, out of the burning: and the same power that is put forth in the beginning of the work of grace, is requisite to the carrying of it on; the rise, progress, and finishing of it, are not by might and power of men, but by the mighty, efficacious, and all-powerful grace of God (2 Thess. 1:11; Zech. 4:6).

5. That the Lord God is omnipotent, may be evinced from the rise and progress of Christianity, the success of the gospel, in the first times of it, and the continuance of it, notwithstanding the opposition of men and devils. The interest of Christ in the world rose from small beginnings; it was like the little stone cut out of the mountain without hands, which became a great mountain, and filled the whole earth; and this by means of the preaching of the gospel; and that by such, who, for the most part, were men illiterate, mean, and contemptible, the foolish things of this world; and who were opposed by Jewish "rabbins", and heathen philosophers, by monarchs, kings, and emperors, and by the whole world; yet these went forth, and Christ with them, conquering and to conquer, and were made to triumph in him over all their enemies everywhere; so that in a short time the universal monarchy of the earth, the whole Roman empire, became nominally Christian; and the Gospel has lived through all the persecutions of Rome pagan and papal, and still continues, notwithstanding the craft of false teachers, and the force of furious persecutors; and will remain and be the everlasting Gospel; all which is owing to the mighty power of God.

6. The final perseverance of every particular believer in grace and holiness, is a proof of the divine omnipotence; it is because he is great in power that not one of them fails; otherwise their indwelling sins and corruptions would prevail over them; Satan's temptations be too powerful for them; and the snares of the world, the flatteries of it, would draw them aside; but they are "kept by the power of God", the mighty power of God, as in a garrison, "through faith unto salvation" (1 Peter 1:5).

7. The almighty power of God will be displayed in the resurrection of the dead; which considered, it need not be thought incredible; though otherwise it might; for what but the all-commanding voice of the almighty God can rouse the dead, and raise them to life, and bring them out of their graves; "some to the resurrection of life, and some to the resurrection of damnation?" What else but his almighty power can gather all nations before him, and oblige them to stand at the judgment seat of Christ, to receive each of their sentences? And what but his vengeful arm of omnipotence can execute the sentence on millions and millions of devils and wicked men, in all the height of wrath, rage, fury, and rebellion? (see Phil. 3:21; John 5:28, 29; Matthew 25:32-46; Rev. 20:8-10).

