



Dear Friends,

I once came across a modern worship song, which included the words, 'There is nothing, absolutely nothing, our God cannot do.' It made me think. Is there really nothing, absolutely nothing, our God cannot do? The tsunami in South East Asia has made me think again about what, in theological jargon, we call God's omnipotence, his all-powerfulness.

There is one obvious thing that God cannot do and that is anything which contradicts or goes against his nature, which is love. God is love and anything, which contradicts that love, cannot be of God. 'I the Lord do not change,' God says through the prophet Malachi. He cannot change his nature. He cannot stop loving.

That being the case we then have to refute the claims of some that the tsunami was sent as a punishment from God for people's sinful lives. If that were the case God would not be a God of love but an indiscriminate monster.

The more basic question we are left with is: If God is love and if he is all-powerful, and certainly if we believe that means that there is absolutely nothing he can do, why did he let the tsunami happen? Why does he let any of the natural disasters happen which frequently occur in various parts of the world?

Could it not be that God has used his power in such a way as to limit himself in what he can and cannot do? This would be true of the way he exercises his power over his children, over you and me. He never forces himself upon us but gives us a choice, and in so doing limits his power over us. Love cannot force itself upon another only respond when the opportunity is given.

I wonder if this same principle of God's self-limited power applies to other areas of his creation? In love God has given us the ability to make fire, that we might create power, keep warm, cook food and see in the dark. But that same fire can burn and kill. It would seem we cannot have one without the other. The same is true of water; it is life giving, we could not live without it, but as the tsunami has shown only too tragically and graphically, it can kill. Without gravity we could not live on this planet, but with it many people fall each year to their deaths, whether in aeroplanes, from windows, or simply missing their footing.

The same principle may well apply to tectonic plates which are always moving and colliding with each other causing earthquakes and tsunamis. Without them we should not have continents and mountains, only a shallow world sea. Human life, as we know it, would not exist.

In exercising his power in one direction it would seem that God inevitably limits his power in another. The greatest demonstration of God's power is seen in his coming to this earth in Jesus – his birth, life, death and resurrection – and yet paradoxically it is here, as '...he became flesh and dwelt among us,' that we see also the greatest demonstration of God's self-limiting power.

God's power is the power of love and, as Paul writes, '...nothing in all creation (not even earthquakes or tsunamis) will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.'

The Lord be with you,
John Bown
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**COMMON
GROUND**

In this edition John Bown writes our leading article. It also appears in the magazines of Bromley Methodist Church & Bromley URC