

SCRIPTURE STUDIES

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“Come now, let us reason together,” says the Lord...” Isaiah 1:18

Old Testament Study:

Exodus 2:23-3:10 3

God Calls Moses

A Classic Study:

Patience in Affliction, pt. 18, by Richard Baxter 8

When God Seemeth Not to Bless Means to Us - I

New Testament Study:

Matthew 15:1-20 12

Tradition vs. the Law

A Topical Study:

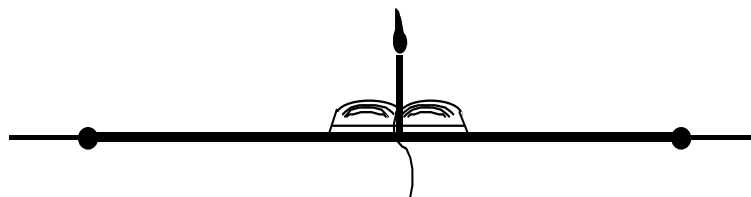
Self-Examination, pt. 5 17

The Necessity of Self-Examination, pt. 1, by Jonathan Edwards

A Study in Psalms:

Psalms 59 19

A Prayer for Deliverance



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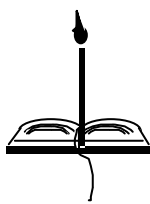
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A Study in Psalms: Exodus 2:23-3:10

God Calls Moses

²³During that long period, the king of Egypt died. The Israelites groaned in their slavery and cried out, and their cry for help because of their slavery went up to God. ²⁴God heard their groaning and He remembered His covenant with Abraham, with Isaac and with Jacob. ²⁵So God looked on the Israelites and was concerned about them.

³¹Now Moses was tending the flock of Jethro his father-in-law, the priest of Midian, and he led the flock to the far side of the desert and came to Horeb, the mountain of God. ²There the angel of the LORD appeared to him in flames of fire from within a bush. Moses saw that though the bush was on fire it did not burn up. ³So Moses thought, “I will go over and see this strange sight—why the bush does not burn up.”

⁴When the LORD saw that he had gone over to look, God called to him from within the bush, “Moses! Moses!”

And Moses said, “Here I am.”

⁵“Do not come any closer,” God said. “Take off your sandals, for the place where you are standing is holy ground.” ⁶Then He said, “I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob.” At this, Moses hid his face, because he was afraid to look at God.

⁷The LORD said, “I have indeed seen the misery of my people in Egypt. I have heard them crying out because of their slave drivers, and I am concerned about their suffering. ⁸So I have come down to rescue them from the hand of the Egyptians and to bring them up out of that land into a good and spacious land, a land flowing with milk and honey—the home of the Canaanites, Hittites, Amorites, Perizzites, Hivites and Jebusites. ⁹And now the cry of the Israelites has reached me, and I have seen the way the Egyptians are oppressing them. ¹⁰So now, go. I am sending you to Pharaoh to bring my people the Israelites out of Egypt.”

While Moses was in Midian, the children of Israel remained oppressed in Egypt: **“During that long period, the king of Egypt died. The Israelites groaned in their slavery and cried out, and their cry for help because of their slavery went up to God”** (vs. 23). It seems to be implied here that the children of Israel expected some measure of relief when the **“king of Egypt died.”** But the change of kings did not ease their oppression, and so **“the Israelites groaned in their slavery and cried out.”**

Their oppression was not to end through a change in leadership, nor through any work of man. God was reserving this work for Himself: **“God heard their groaning and He remembered His covenant with Abraham, with Isaac and with Jacob. So God looked on the Israelites and was concerned about them”** (vss. 24–25). “Silent as God seems through the long hours and years, He is not indifferent” [Meyer, 38]. In fact, in the case of the Israelites, everything was going as planned. God had prophesied to Abraham, hundreds of years before, that His people would be held as slaves for four hundred years: **“Then the Lord said to [Abraham], ‘Know for certain that your descendants will be strangers in a country not their own, and they will be enslaved and mistreated four hundred years’”** (Gen. 15:13). God also prophesied their deliverance: **“But I will punish the nation they serve as slaves, and afterward they will come out with great possessions”** (Gen. 15:14). “God’s covenant is God’s engagement” [Clarke]; and so, since God promised their deliverance after 400 years, it was certain to happen.

And indeed, the time had come for the deliverance of the Israelites: **“God heard [the Israelites’] groaning and He remembered His covenant with Abraham, with Isaac and with Jacob. So God looked on the Israelites and was concerned about them”** (vss. 24–25). Note God’s care for His people: **“God heard... He remembered... God looked on... [God] was concerned.”** Some, who would grudgingly admit there may be a God, would say, “Even if there is a God, He doesn’t care for us.” This is refuted in many ways by the writings of the Bible and the history of God’s people. He sees, He cares, He is intimately concerned with what goes on here on earth.

At that time, Moses was still in Midian: **“Now Moses was tending the flock of Jethro his father-in-law, the priest of Midian, and he led the flock to the far side of the desert and came to Horeb, the mountain of God”** (vs. 1). Moses’ life can be neatly divided into three sections, each forty years in length. He spent forty years as a prince in Pharaoh’s court. He spent forty years as a shepherd in Midian, as seen here. After leaving Midian, he would spend forty years as the deliverer of the children of Israel. “So changeable is the life of men, especially the life of good men” [Henry]. It was certainly difficult for Moses to go from being a prince, to being a shepherd. “This was a poor employment for a man of his parts and education, yet he rests satisfied with it, and thus learns meek-

ness and contentment to a high degree” [Henry]. The transition was all the more difficult because, as we are told in Genesis, **“all shepherds are detestable to the Egyptians”** (Gen. 46:34), and Moses essentially was raised as an Egyptian.

Stephen, in the New Testament, tells us that at the end of Moses’ forty years as a prince in Egypt, after he killed the Egyptian, he **“thought that his own people would realize that God was using him to rescue them”** (Acts 7:25). So, back then, Moses had a desire to serve as the deliverer of the children of Israel. However, after spending forty years in Midian, Moses must surely have thought that God would never use him in such a capacity. But who can fathom the ways of the Lord? “Sometimes it is long before God calls His servants to that work which of old He designed them for, and has been graciously preparing them for. Moses was born to be Israel’s deliverer, and yet not a word is said of it to him till he is eighty years of age” [Henry]. Learn this, dear reader: it is never too late for the Lord to use you in a great and magnificent way.

An ordinary day at shepherding turned out to be not so ordinary for Moses: **“He led the flock to the far side of the desert and came to Horeb, the mountain of God. There the angel of the LORD appeared to him in flames of fire within a bush. Moses saw that though the bush was on fire it did not burn up. So Moses thought, ‘I will go over and see this strange sight—why the bush does not burn up’”** (vs. 1–3). Moses saw an extraordinary sight: a bush burning, yet not being burned. Many commentators see the bush as symbolic of the children of Israel, “in its various distresses and persecutions: it was in the fire of adversity, but was not consumed” [Clarke].

And even more extraordinary than the unconsumed, burning bush, was the appearance of the **“angel of the LORD”** within the bush. Do not be fooled by the expression **“angel of the LORD.”** It was not a created **“angel,”** but was the Lord Himself in the form of an angel. We know that this was not a created angel because He is called the Lord in the text, and also because He accepts worship as the Lord (created angels do not accept the worship of men, see Rev. 19:10). “It was necessary that the Lord should assume a visible form, that He might be seen by Moses, not as He was in His essence, but as the infirmity of the human mind could comprehend Him” [Calvin]. The Lord appeared to His people various times as the **“angel of the Lord”**: He wrestled all night with Jacob (Gen. 32:22ff); He prevented Balaam from prophesying against Israel (Num. 22:23ff); He encouraged Joshua before the battle of Jericho (Josh. 5:13ff); et. al. Many commentators believe that this angel of the Lord was none other than Jesus Christ, appearing to His people in the Old Testament. “Not a created angel certainly, for He is called Jehovah (Ex. 3:4), and has the most expressive attributes of the Godhead applied to Him (see Ex. 3:14). Yet He is an angel, a messenger, in whom was the name of God (Ex.

23:21), and in whom dwelt all the fullness of the Godhead bodily (see Col. 2:9); and who, in all these primitive times, was the Messenger of the covenant (Mal. 3:1). And who was this but Jesus, the Leader, Redeemer, and Savior of mankind" [Clarke].

The Lord spoke to Moses: **"When the LORD saw that he had gone over to look, God called to him from within the bush, 'Moses! Moses!' And Moses said, 'Here I am'"** (vs. 4). The call to service of Moses by God was personal: the Lord called him by name, **"Moses! Moses!"**

The Lord then identified Himself: **"'Do not come any closer,' God said. 'Take off your sandals, for the place where you are standing is holy ground.' Then He said, 'I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob.' At this, Moses hid his face, because he was afraid to look at God"** (vss. 5–6). The Lord first identified Himself as a holy God: a God who demands our reverence and respect, thus Moses was told to take off his sandals to approach Him. "The more we see of God, the more cause we shall see to worship Him with reverence and godly fear" [Wesley]. Next, the Lord identified Himself as the God of the covenant: the **"God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob."** This should have encouraged Moses. "God's covenant-relation to us as our God is the best support in the worst of times, and a great encouragement to our faith in particular promises" [Henry].

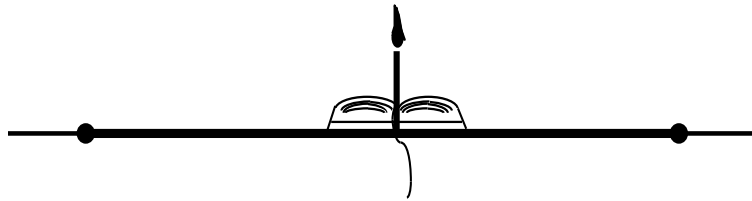
Next, the Lord expressed to Moses how much He cares for the children of Israel: **"The Lord said, 'I have indeed seen the misery of my people in Egypt. I have heard them crying out because of their slave drivers, and I am concerned about their suffering'"** (vs. 7). Again note the love God has for His people: He saw their misery, He heard them crying, and was concerned about their suffering.

The Lord went on to tell Moses what He would do about the suffering of His people: **"So I have come down to rescue them from the hand of the Egyptians and to bring them up out of that land into a good and spacious land, a land flowing with milk and honey—the home of the Canaanites, Hittites,"** etc. (vs. 8). God not only sees our suffering and misery, He does something about it. For the children of Israel in Egypt, He was to miraculously lead them out of their oppression, and into a land He prepared for them. The salvation He brought to the children of Israel in Egypt is typical of the salvation He brings all of us: "Admire the typical picture here, a prophetic picture of the Divine Incarnation. First the Divine compassion which prompted the unspeakable gift: **'I have surely seen the affliction of my people which are in Egypt'**—God contemplated the wretched condition of sinners and their need of deliverance. Second, the Incarnation itself: **'I am come down.'** Thus it was fifteen hundred years later, when Jehovah-Jesus left His Father's house on high and came down to these scenes of sin and suffering.

Third, the purpose of the Incarnation: to '**deliver**' His people and '**bring them up out of that land,**' which symbolizes the world. Fourth, the beneficent design of the Incarnation: to '**bring them into a good land and large, unto a land flowing with milk and honey**'—to bring us on to resurrection ground, where there would be everything to satisfy and rejoice the heart" [Pink, 27].

As is normal for when God works in the world, He chose a person to be His servant. God chose Moses to deliver His people: "**And now the cry of the Israelites has reached me, and I have seen the way the Egyptians are oppressing them. So now, go. I am sending you to Pharaoh to bring my people the Israelites out of Egypt**" (vss. 9–10). "Had God so chosen He could have sent forth His angels, and in a single night destroyed all the Egyptians... Human instrumentality is the means He most commonly employs in bringing sinners from bondage to liberty, from death to life" [Pink, 28].

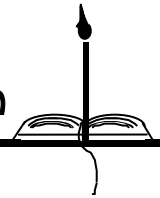
Notice the wording of God's command to Moses: "**So now, go.**" "**Now**" was the time ordained by God to save His people. "For many long years had the groans and cries of the distressed Hebrews gone up; but the heavens were silent. Forty years previously, Moses had become impatient at the delay, and thought to take matters into His own hands, only to discover that the time for deliverance was not yet ripe" [Pink, 28]. God knows best *what* to do, as well as *when* to do it. We would all do well, before venturing into any activity, to seek the advice, guidance and timing of the Lord of the Universe.



"Follow thy general calling with the greatest industry; pursue it diligently, do not loiter but labour about it; lay aside what may hinder, lay hold of what may further it, and mind it as the main and principal work which thou hast to do in this world."

-- George Swinmock (1627-1673)

A Classic Study: Patience in Affliction



A Classic Study by Richard Baxter (1615–1691)

[Here, we continue a reprint of excerpts from Richard Baxter's work entitled *Obedient Patience*. In each article, Mr. Baxter gives advice on how to be patient through a specific type of affliction.]—*Ed.*

When God Seemeth Not to Bless Means to Us: Preaching, Praying, etc. - I

Another great trial of patience is, when praying and preaching seem to us to be all lost, and God denieth His answer and His blessing. When we hear from day to day, and understand and remember little that we hear, and find not that we are any stronger in faith, love, and patience than we were; when we pray daily for more grace, and yet find no more than we had before; and we pray for our country, and our rulers, and teachers, and for many friends, and God seemeth to deny us almost all.

And this is not only grievous in itself, but in the temptations which it occasioneth. 1. Satan hence would tempt us to doubt whether God regarded man, and man's concerns, as the Scripture tells us that He doth. 2. And he would tempt us to doubt whether the promises of God are to be trusted. 3. And consequently to question all religion, and to give over least to use them heartlessly, with little faith, and hope, and comfort: and how should patience here be exercised, and these temptations overcome?

I. Our first work must be to understand God's instituted means, and the promises of God concerning their success, that we may be neither too high nor too low in our expectations, nor charge God foolishly through our mistake.

What is it that God denieth you? Is it outward things, as health, wealth, deliverance from dangers, the life of your friends, the conversion of your relations, etc.? And why think you that prayer in such cases is in vain?

1. Did you think that it was ever the mind and promise of God, that on pretence of hearing prayer, He should give up to us the government of the world? And that we should never be poor, nor sick, nor die till we are willing? I doubt then few would ever consent, but live longer than Methuselah in earthly prosperity and pleasure. And must our friends never suffer nor die as long as we will pray against it? Where then would there be room for those that are born (unless God made our friends a burden to us; and would not that be as much against our prayers as their death)? Did you think that God must reverse His first sentence, if you will but pray for it? **“Dust thou art, and to dust thou shalt return. In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread till thou return unto the ground”** (Gen. 3:17–19). Must there be no thorns or briars, no cold or winter, no night or darkness, if you will but pray that there be none? You will say, it is moderate and reasonable prayers that you make.

But, 2. Who must be judge what requests are reasonable: God, or you? If you must be judge, how can we tell what bounds your desires will have? You will not ask to live in prosperity a thousand years; but when death is coming at a hundred years' end, you would live yet longer, and so on forever, still longer and longer; and a thousand years would not make you willing, if either faith or affliction do it not.

3. And would you have all others have the same grant, that affliction and death should be kept off if they do but pray for it; and that God should give them what they ask? This would infer a thousand contradictions. A thousand men would ask to be kings of England, where there can be but one. Many would ask for the same lordships, lands, or offices: some of them would take you for enemies, and ask for your death or ruin, and it may be you would ask for theirs. They would have your house, your wife, your trade, and you would have theirs. So many would live long, as that you would want food and room. What a mad wish were this, for all men to have their wills! The world is full of folly and wickedness, and wrath and malice; should all such persons have their wills? What is this conceit but a dream of millions of mischiefs, confusions, and impossibilities? One may see by such desires how the world would be governed, if God gave it up to the will of man. Could there be any unity, where every man would rule, and every man hath an interest cross to others? Can there be any order or goodness, when all men are partly bad, and every bad man would have his will?

But you will say, that it is not bad men, nor bad desires, that you would have God to grant, but only what is just and good. *Answer.* But who shall be judge of what is just and good? If every man must be judge, unjust and wicked prayers must be granted; and the judgment and wishes of many will be against yours. If it be you that must be judge, though it is

likely you would have it so, you cannot for shame sure speak it out. This were for God to resign His place to you, and make you the God and Governor of the world, and only those prayers must be granted which you think just and good. Whence are all the bloody wars in the world, but that one king would have that which another hath, or have his will against another? You may see then that it is worse than madness to desire that any but God should be the highest disposer of the affairs of men, and determine what shall befall us in this world.

4. And do you think that God is unfit to do it? Doth He lack wisdom to know what is best? Doth He lack goodness to choose what is best? Or doth He lack power to do what is best? Who hath it if God lacks it? And how did they come to have it if not by Him? And doth He give more than He hath Himself? If He hath any imperfection He is not God.

5. It is most certain that all things are done well by God, and as they should be; and therefore the cause of your dissatisfaction is in yourselves. And indeed in these several evils you may find it:

(i). By your sin you provoked God in justice to correct you, and deny your prayers.

(ii). And by your present badness you make yourselves unfit for that which you desire, that is good.

(iii). And by your blindness and fleshly mind, you desire that which is not to be desired.

(iv). And after all this, by your idolatrous, usurping self-will you are discontented with God for not giving you your desires. These four things contain your case: and is not every one of them a shameful evil?

II. But suppose that it be not outward things, but more grace, and assurance, and comfort, and deliverance from temptation and sin, that you pray against, and God doth not give it you: is not this cause of questioning the success of prayer, or of doubting at least of my own success, and whether my prayers are not all in vain?

Answer. That I may give you full satisfaction, I will tell you, 1. What kind of means prayer is. 2. What prayer it is that is such a means. 3. What may be expected by means of prayer, and what not. 4. I will prove to you that prayer is not in vain, nor God's promises to it broken. 5. I will show you why you should be patient under God's denials.

1. Prayer is not a purchasing means, nor a meriting by giving God anything which may benefit Him; nor doth it work any change on God; but it procureth blessings by fitting the petitioner to receive them. And that in several respects:

(i) Even naturally considered, it is a contradiction for a man to be unwillingly happy, and to attain the happiness which he desireth without so much as asking Him that alone can give it.

(ii). Morally considered, a man is very unfit for and unworthy of the

benefit which he thinks not worth his asking; especially if it be the greatest blessing that man is capable of, which he so despiseth.

(iii). And legally considered, the gift cannot be his, that performeth not the condition imposed by the donor, especially when it is but so reasonable a one, as ask and have.

So that you see, though prayer purchase not and change not God, it is a naturally, morally, and economically necessary qualification and condition of our reception, and thus only it hath the nature of a means.

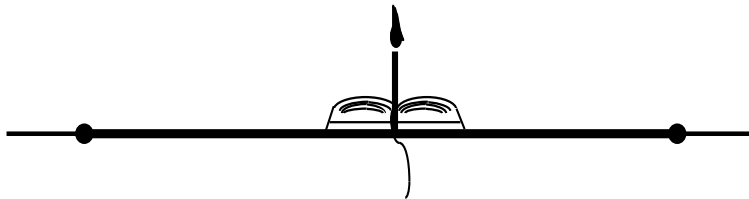
2. There are three sorts of prayer, which are not in vain, and yet much differ as to their success:

(i). There is prayer that is not dissembled, but cometh only from natural principles or common grace; such as Ahab's humiliation, and the mariners' prayers in Jonah; and it is like the Ninevites' and Simon Magus's desires to escape punishment. This is not in vain. I cannot say that God is under any promise to grant it, but He oft doth grant it, and pity such as cry to Him in their misery.

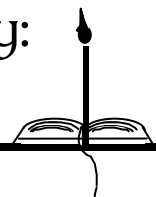
(ii). There is the prayer of sincere, weak Christians, who are guilty of much weakness of faith, and coldness of desire; these yet through Christ have certain promises of necessary things.

(iii). There are the fervent and faithful prayers of men of eminent faith and holiness; and these oft prevail for extraordinary blessings, which are not promised to the prayers of every true Christian. Elijah, and Elisha, and Peter did miracles by prayer. There are devils, and sins, and sufferings, that go not out but by fasting and prayer. The effectual, fervent prayer of an excellent, righteous man, availeth more than ordinary Christians. If church history may be credited, such were the prayers of Gregory of Neocaesarea, Martin of Tours, and some other holy men that prevailed for wonders or miracles with God. Not all attain their success.

(This study will continue in the next issue, D.V.)



New Testament Study: Matthew 15:1-20



Tradition vs. the Law

¹Then some Pharisees and teachers of the law came to Jesus from Jerusalem and asked, ²“Why do your disciples break the tradition of the elders? They don’t wash their hands before they eat!”

³Jesus replied, “And why do you break the command of God for the sake of your tradition? ⁴For God said, ‘Honor your father and mother’ and ‘Anyone who curses his father or mother must be put to death.’ ⁵But you say that if a man says to his father or mother, ‘Whatever help you might otherwise have received from me is a gift devoted to God,’ ⁶he is not to ‘honor his father’ with it. Thus you nullify the word of God for the sake of your tradition. ⁷You hypocrites! Isaiah was right when he prophesied about you:

⁸“These people honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me. ⁹They worship me in vain; their teachings are but rules taught by men.”

¹⁰Jesus called the crowd to Him and said, “Listen and understand. ¹¹What goes into a man’s mouth does not make him ‘unclean,’ but what comes out of his mouth, that is what makes him ‘unclean.’”

¹²Then the disciples came to him and asked, “Do you know that the Pharisees were offended when they heard this?”

¹³He replied, “Every plant that my heavenly Father has not planted will be pulled up by the roots. ¹⁴Leave them; they are blind guides. If a blind man leads a blind man, both will fall into a pit.”

¹⁵Peter said, “Explain the parable to us.”

¹⁶“Are you still so dull?” Jesus asked them. ¹⁷“Don’t you see that whatever enters the mouth goes into the stomach and then out of the body? ¹⁸But the things that

come out of the mouth come from the heart, and these make a man 'unclean.' ¹⁹For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false testimony, slander. ²⁰These are what make a man 'unclean'; but eating with unwashed hands does not make him 'unclean.'"

Matthew next tells us of a dispute that the Pharisees had with Jesus concerning the behavior of His disciples: **"Then some Pharisees and teachers of the law came to Jesus from Jerusalem and asked, 'Why do your disciples break the tradition of the elders? They don't wash their hands before they eat!'"** (vss. 1-2). The Pharisees were faulting the disciples for not following the ceremonial washing ritual, which was a **"tradition of the elders."** They were not faulting the disciples on hygienic grounds, but rather on religious grounds. They were not questioning Jesus' disciples for being unsanitary, but for being ungodly. The Pharisees considered the disciples' failure to wash their hands before eating to be sinful.

Now, it is difficult enough to struggle with our sin nature as we try to live a holy and godly life, according to the precepts of God's Word. Given this difficulty, it is sinful to add to the laws of God precepts of men, and to claim that these precepts of men must be obeyed as well, in order to live a holy and godly life. To add to God's Law is as sinful as to subtract from it, for to add to God's Law is to misrepresent God, and to add burdens to people's lives that God never intended there to be.

It could have well been that the teachers of the law who espoused the **"tradition of the elders"** originally meant well. The tradition of the elders "was a body of teaching handed down from the religious leaders of the past. Some of it was concerned with the way those leaders had understood passages in Scripture, especially passages whose meaning was not obvious or was ambiguous. It also gave guidance as to how passages that might be construed in more than one way were to be understood. In origin the tradition was praiseworthy and useful, but through the years, with the contributions of many teachers, some with less insight than others, it had come to amount to a very burdensome body of doctrine. Its huge volume meant that by New Testament times even to know what it comprised was a difficult chore, while to obey all its multitudinous regulations was too big a task for most people" [Morris, 390].

So, the Pharisees were wrong, as the religious leaders of the people, to burden them with commands written by men. They were also wrong in valuing the **"tradition of the elders"** over the true word of God, as Jesus points out: **"Jesus replied, 'And why do you break the command of**

God for the sake of your tradition? For God said, “Honor your father and mother” and “Anyone who curses his father or mother must be put to death.” But you say that if a man says to his father or mother, “Whatever help you might otherwise have received from me is a gift devoted to God,” he is not to “honor his father” with it. Thus you nullify the word of God for the sake of your tradition. You hypocrites! Isaiah was right when he prophesied about you: “These people honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me. They worship me in vain; their teachings are but rules taught by men”” (vss. 3–9). Jesus responds to the question of the Pharisees by pointing out that, from a religious point of view, the commandments of men mean nothing. Moreover, He takes the Pharisees to task for allowing their traditions to supercede the commandments of God. “Traditions, when once invested with anything like authority, tend to obscure commands and displace supremacy of Scripture; indeed, there is nothing more solemnly significant than that in proportion as tradition, even Church tradition, gains sway, reverence for Scripture declines” [Thomas, 228]. Jesus gives the Pharisees an example of where this has happened. There was a “**tradition**” of theirs, which the teachers of the Law sanctioned, that allowed children to dodge their God-commanded obligation to honor their parents by helping to support them when in need. Broadus explains the tradition: “If a man’s father or mother wanted any article from him—it might be food or clothing, or what not—he could just say, ‘Corban, it is a gift, a thing consecrated to God (comp. Lev. 27:9,16), and he was then, according to the traditional rules, not only at liberty to withhold it from his parent, but solemnly bound to do so. The Mishna tells of a former discussion as to whether a vow could be set aside through regard for parents, and all but one Rabbi declared in the negative. The Jews reached this conclusion by arguing that vows, as they had respect to God, were more important than things pertaining to men; and hence that devoting a thing to God was sufficient to set aside the highest obligation, even that to one’s parents. Here was a correct principle, greatly abused in the application. We learn from the Talmud, which has copious directions on this subject, that a man was not bound, after saying, ‘Corban’, actually to dedicate the article in the temple, but might keep it indefinitely for his own use, or might give it to some person, only not to the one had in mind when he made the vow” [Broadus, 334].

As Jesus points out, and as Isaiah prophesied, by allowing their “**tradition**” to overrule the spirit and letter of God’s Law, they were worshipping God “**in vain**”, with teachings that are but “**rules taught by men.**” So, Jesus showed that the “**tradition of the elders**” was at best worthless in the eyes of God, and at worst, harmful to those who follow it,

for following it may cause one to neglect the true Law of God.

In general, men have no business inventing religious traditions or rituals. God has prescribed in His Word the proper way to worship Him. Anything added to the Word of God, detracts from it. “At the present day many persons claim a divine authority for ideas and practices which are simply of human origin. We are not only under no obligation to conform to these, but it is our duty to oppose them wherever they tend to the violation or neglect of God’s commandments” [Broadus, 336].

The Pharisees, in accusing the disciples, were flawed in their thinking as to what makes a person “unclean” in the eyes of God. Jesus directly straightens them out on this question: **“Jesus called the crowd to Him and said, ‘Listen and understand. What goes into a man’s mouth does not make him “unclean,” but what comes out of his mouth, that is what makes him “unclean.”’”** (vss. 10–11). The Pharisees took the ceremonial laws that were given to the children of Israel in the desert concerning clean and unclean things, and expanded those ceremonial laws so as to make them moral laws. “The Jews had come very largely to confound ceremonial with moral defilement. To correct this confusion of ideas, our Lord points out that articles of food cannot really pollute, because they pass through the body and out of it, and do not ‘enter the heart’ (see Mark 7:19)” [Broadus, 338]. It was as if the Pharisees literally lived by the saying, “Cleanliness is next to godliness.” Now, clearly, to be physically clean is not a bad thing, but it doesn’t make one more spiritual. And certainly, one should not be more concerned with how one washes his hands, than how one treats his neighbor. This may sound ridiculously obvious, and yet, do we not place too much emphasis on appearance, than on godliness? Even Chrysostom, writing in the fourth century, noticed this: “Even in the church we see such a custom prevailing amongst the generality, and men giving diligence to come in clean garments, and to have their hands washed; but how to present a clean soul to God, they make no account” [Chrysostom].

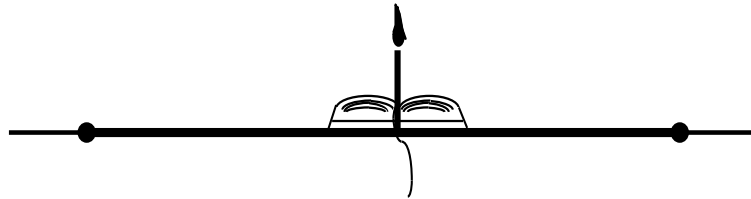
Jesus’ disciples were puzzled at His criticism of the Pharisees: **“Then the disciples came to him and asked, ‘Do you know that the Pharisees were offended when they heard this?’”** (vs. 12). I guess the disciples had not yet fully caught on that Jesus is the Lord of Heaven and Earth, for they were puzzled that Jesus would dispute with the Pharisees about fine points of the Law. We must be wary to put too much credence on what any mere man, even religious leaders, says about the things of God. We must seek the guidance of the Spirit, and diligently study God’s Word, so that we can properly discern right and wrong.

Jesus let the disciples know that the teaching of Pharisees would not endure, for it was not rooted in God’s Word: **“He replied, ‘Every plant**

that my heavenly Father has not planted will be pulled up by the roots. Leave them; they are blind guides. If a blind man leads a blind man, both will fall into a pit" (vss. 13–14). So we see that the Pharisees were original model for the phrase, "the blind leading the blind." "Blind guides" is a devastating description of the Pharisees, men who prided themselves on their enlightenment" [Morris, 397].

Peter still had problems understanding Jesus' corrected teaching: **"Peter said, 'Explain the parable to us'"** (vs. 15). Peter thought that Jesus was speaking parabolically, though He was not. What Jesus said should have been clear to the disciples. But the Pharisees had so emphasized external cleanliness, external holiness, an external impression of godliness, that the disciples could not understand that a clean heart is much more valued in the eyes of God than a clean body.

Jesus chides the disciples on their lack of understanding, and then explains the principle once again: **"Are you still so dull?" Jesus asked them. 'Don't you see that whatever enters the mouth goes into the stomach and then out of the body? But the things that come out of the mouth come from the heart, and these make a man "unclean." For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false testimony, slander. These are what make a man "unclean"; but eating with unwashed hands does not make him "unclean"'"** (vss. 16–20). "Familiar though these sayings have now become, what freedom from bondage to outward things do they proclaim, on the one hand, and on the other, how searching is the truth which they express—that nothing which enters from without can really defile us; and that only the evil that is in the heart, that is allowed to stir there, to rise up in thought and affection, and to flow forth in voluntary action, really defiles a man" [JFB, 86].





A Topical Study: Self-Examination

The Necessity of Self-Examination, pt. 1 by Jonathan Edwards (1703-1758)

[Here, we begin another study on self-examination. This one is by the famous American evangelist, Jonathan Edwards]—*Ed.*

Search me, O God, and know my heart; try me, and know my thoughts; and see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting. (Ps. 139:23-24, AV).

Introduction

This psalm is a meditation on the omniscience of God, or upon his perfect view and knowledge of everything, which the psalmist represents by that perfect knowledge which God had of all the psalmist's action—his down-sitting and his uprising; and of his thoughts (so that He knew his thoughts afar on); and of his words: **“There is not a word in my tongue,”** says the psalmist, **“but thou knowest it altogether”** (Ps. 139:4). Then he represents it by the impossibility of fleeing from the divine presence, or of hiding from Him so that if he should go into heaven, or hide himself in hell, or fly to the uttermost parts of the sea, yet he would not be hid from God; or if he should endeavour to hide himself in darkness, yet that would not cover him, but the darkness and light are both alike to Him. Then he represents it by the knowledge which God had of him while in his mother's womb: **“My substance was not hid from thee, when I was made in secret, thine eyes did see my substance, yet being imperfect; and in thy book all my members were written”** (Ps. 139:15-16).

After this the psalmist observes what must be inferred as a necessary consequence of this omniscience of God, viz. that He will slay the wicked, since He seeth all their wickedness, and nothing of it is hid from Him. And last of all, the psalmist improves this meditation upon God's all seeing eye, in begging of God that He would search and try him, to see if there were any wicked way in him, and lead him in the way everlasting.

Three things may be noted in the words.

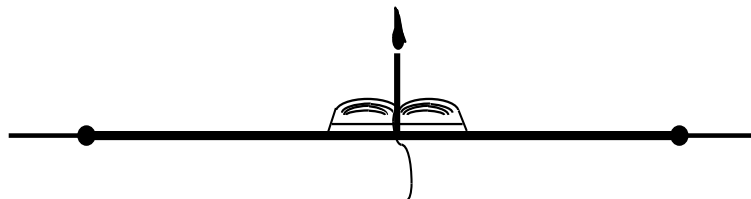
1. The act of mercy which the psalmist implores of God towards himself, viz. that God would search him. **“Search me, O God, and know my heart; try me, and know my thoughts”** (vs. 23).

2. In what respect he desires to be searched, viz. **“to see if there were any wicked way in him”** (vs. 24). We are not to understand by it, that the psalmist means that God should search him for His own information. What he had said before, of God’s knowing all things, implies that He hath no need of that. The psalmist had said, in the second verse, that God understood his thought afar off, i.e. it was all plain before Him, He saw it without difficulty, or without being forced to come nigh, and diligently to observe. That which is plain to be seen, may be seen at a distance.

Therefore, when the psalmist prays that God would search him to see if there were any wicked way in him, he cannot mean that he should search that He Himself might see or be informed, but that the psalmist might see and be informed. He prays that God would search him by His discovering light that He would lead him thoroughly to discern himself, and see whether there were any wicked way in him. Such figurative expressions are often used in Scripture. The word of God is said to be a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart. Not that the word itself discerns, but it searches and opens our hearts to view, so that it enables us to discern the temper and desires of our hearts. So God is often said to try men. He doth not try them for His own information, but for the discovery and manifestation of them to themselves or others.

3. Observe to what end he thus desires God to search him, viz. **“That he might be led in the way everlasting”** (vs. 24), i.e., not only in a way which may have a specious show, and appear right to him for a while, and in which he may have peace and quietness for the present, but in the way which will hold, which will stand the test, which he may confidently abide by forever, and always approve of as good and right, and in which he may always have peace and joy. It is said, that **“the way of the ungodly shall perish,”** (Psalm 1:6). In opposition to this, the way of the righteous is in the text said to last forever.

(This study will continue, D.V., in the next issue.)





A Study in Psalms: Psalm 59

Psalm 59 - A Prayer for Deliverance

For the director of music.

To the tune of "Do Not Destroy". Of David. A *miktam*.

When Saul had sent men to watch David's house in order to kill him.

¹Deliver me from my enemies, O God;
protect me from those who rise up against me.

²Deliver me from evildoers
and save me from bloodthirsty men.

³See how they lie in wait for me!
Fierce men conspire against me
for no offense or sin of mine, O LORD.

⁴I have done no wrong,
yet they are ready to attack me.
Arise to help me; look on my plight!

⁵O LORD God Almighty, the God of Israel,
rouse Yourself to punish all the nations;
show no mercy to wicked traitors. *Selah*

⁶They return at evening, snarling like dogs,
and prowl about the city.

⁷See what they spew from their mouths—
they spew out swords from their lips,
and they say, "Who can hear us?"

⁸But You, O LORD, laugh at them;
You scoff at all those nations.

⁹O my Strength, I watch for You;
You, O God, are my fortress, ¹⁰my loving God.
God will go before me and will let me gloat over
those who slander me.

¹¹But do not kill them, O Lord our shield,
or my people will forget.
In Your might make them wander about,
and bring them down.

¹²For the sins of their mouths,
for the words of their lips,
let them be caught in their pride.

For the curses and lies they utter,
¹³consume them in wrath,
 consume them till they are no more.
 Then it will be known to the ends of the earth
 that God rules over Jacob. *Selah*

¹⁴They return at evening, snarling like dogs,
 and prowl about the city.

¹⁵They wander about for food
 and howl if not satisfied.

¹⁶But I will sing of Your strength,
 in the morning I will sing of Your love;
 for You are my fortress,
 my refuge in times of trouble.

¹⁷O my Strength, I sing praise to You;
 You, O God, are my fortress, my loving God.”

As stated in the inscription, the occasion of this psalm was **“when Saul had sent men to watch David’s house in order to kill him.”** This episode is found in I Sam. 19:11ff. In it, David’s wife, and Saul’s daughter, Michal heard that Saul was sending men to kill David. She helped David escape by letting him out a window. This episode marked the beginning of David’s long ordeal of fleeing from Saul. The many events that occurred while David fled from Saul inspired many a psalm. “Strange that the painful events in David’s life should end in enriching the repertoire of the national minstrelsy. Out of a sour, ungenerous soil spring up the honey bearing flowers of psalmody. Had he never been cruelly hunted by Saul, Israel and the church of God in after ages would have missed this song. The music of the sanctuary is in no small degree indebted to the trials of the saints. Affliction is the turner of the harps of sanctified songsters” [Spurgeon].

As is so many of these psalms which are inspired by desperate situations, this one is a prayer: **“Deliver me from my enemies, O God; protect me from those who rise up against me. Deliver me from evildoers and save me from bloodthirsty men”** (vss. 1–2). “Desperate-like dangers, arising from the power and craftiness of enemies, must not discourage the godly, but sharpen their prayer to God, with whom are power and wisdom to deliver them” [Dickson, 350]. David’s enemies were **“bloodthirsty men”** and **“evildoers”**, which made them not only enemies of David, but also enemies of God. “Saul had more cause to fear than David had, for the invincible weapon of prayer was being used against him, and heaven was being aroused to give him battle” [Henry].

David describes the situation: **“See how they lie in wait for me! Fierce men conspire against me for no offense or sin of mine, O LORD”** (vs. 4). They **“lie in wait”** like a beast would for its prey. “While the enemy lies waiting in the posture of a beast, we wait before God in the posture of prayer” [Spurgeon]. They are **“fierce men”**, who **“conspire”**:

they are zealous in their evil deeds. “The zeal and diligence of the wicked in the cause of unrighteousness might well reprove the languor and tardiness of saints in the work of faith and labor of love” [Plumer, 610].

David speaks of his own blamelessness: **“I have done no wrong, yet they are ready to attack me. Arise to help me; look on my plight!”** (vs. 4). David, of course, is not claiming sinlessness in all things, but he is asserting his innocence in this situation. On this basis, he cries out to God, **“Arise to help me.”** “The basest deceivers and the worst criminals are so much in the habit of making solemn protestations of innocence, that an assertion of our freedom from criminality has with many very little weight. Yet to the innocent it is an unspeakable consolation to be able to deny every charge; and before God in prayer the argument of injured innocence has prodigious power” [Plumer, 606]. “We shall always find it to be a great thing to be innocent; if it does not carry our cause before an earthly tribunal, it will ever prove the best of arguments in the court of conscience, and a standing consolation when we are under persecution” [Spurgeon]. Note, though, that in this fallen world, David’s innocence does not keep him out of trouble, nor away from persecution. “Though our innocence will not secure us from troubles, yet it will greatly support and comfort us under our troubles” [Spurgeon]. And indeed, “when we suffer for well-doing, we are conformed to our Redeemer, and have an evidence of our acceptance with God. We should indeed greatly fear suffering as **‘evil doers, or busy-bodies in other men’s matters’** (1 Pet. 4:15); but we ought not to be either afraid or ashamed of the hatred of the workers of iniquity” [Plumer, 610].

Though David has done no wrong, **“yet”** his enemies stand poised to attack him. In his innocence, they attack him for nothing, for no earthly reason. What a waste of human effort!

David cries out for justice: **“Arise to help me; look on my plight! O Lord God Almighty, the God of Israel, rouse Yourself to punish all the nations; show no mercy to wicked traitors”** (vss. 4–5). At times, when we pray, we speak to God as if He were asleep, completely clueless to our plight. **“Arise”**, says David, **“Rouse Yourself.”** But God is not asleep, and He is aware of our troubles, and He will bring His salvation and execute His justice in His time. “The Lord will let the plot go on, and the danger of the godly grow, as if He minded not to take notice of it, that He may first put His children to prayer, and then appear in the fit time” [Dickson, 350].

David cries out to God as the **“LORD God Almighty”** and **“the God of Israel.”** The name **“God Almighty”** implies “the boundless resources which He has at command for His people’s good.” [JFB, 227]. The name **“God of Israel”** implies the willingness with which He will use these resources for His people’s good.

Just as there was something beast-like in David’s enemies lying in wait for him, so also was there something beast-like in their doing their deeds

by night: **“They return at evening, snarling like dogs, and prowl about the city”** (vs. 6). “Ordinary laborers quit work in the evening. Although David’s foes were not idle during the day, yet like dogs, which infest oriental cities, they renewed with great eagerness their pursuit of him at night when honest men commonly went to sleep” [Plumer, 607].

They mistakenly think that, by night, no one will see their evil deeds: **“See what they spew from their mouths—they spew out swords from their lips, and they say, ‘Who can hear us?’ But You, O Lord, laugh at them; You scoff at all those nations”** (vss. 7–8). God not only sees their evil deeds, He mocks them.

As his enemies scheme, David waits for the Lord’s deliverance: **“O my Strength, I watch for You; You, O God, are my fortress, my loving God”** (vss. 9–10). As his enemies watch for him in their ambush, David **“watches”** for God. He resolves to wait for God’s deliverance. Moreover, he expects God’s work of salvation: **“God will go before me and will let me gloat over those who slander me”** (vs. 10). And why should we not expect God’s work of salvation. “To God no set of circumstances creates a crisis, an emergency, or an exigency. He is eternally and infinitely calm” [Plumer, 611].

David wants the punishment of his enemies to be a long-term reminder to the people: **“But do not kill them, O Lord our shield, or my people will forget. In Your might make the wander about, and bring them down”** (vs. 11). “Swift destructions startle men for the present, but they are soon forgotten, for which reason he prays that this might be gradual” [Henry].

Not only for their actions, but also for their words do they deserve punishment: **“For the sins of their mouths, for the words of their lips, let them be caught in their pride. For the curses and lies they utter, consume them in wrath, consume them till they are no more. Then it will be known to the ends of the earth that God rules over Jacob”** (vss. 12–13).

David’s enemies do not stumble into evil; rather they crave evil like hungry beasts crave food: **“They return at evening, snarling like dogs, and prowl about the city. They wander about for food and howl if not satisfied”** (vss. 14–15). Their craving for evil is contrasted by David’s craving to worship the Lord, as he anticipates his deliverance: **“But I will sing of Your strength, in the morning I will sing of Your love; for You are my fortress, my refuge in times of trouble. O my Strength, I sing praise to You; You, O God, are my fortress, my loving God”** (vss. 16–17). Note that David will praise God for His strength and love. For the saints, both attributes are valuable. “Power, without mercy, is to be dreaded; mercy, without power, is not what a man can expect much benefit from; but God’s power by which He is able to help us, and His mercy by which He is inclined to help us, will justly be the everlasting praise of all the saints” [Henry].

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God Works Through Man

"There are some ignorant Christians that think it enough to charge anything in worship or religion to be unlawful because it is human, the work of man. It is likely, these will not be grieved that their teachers are silenced, for they were men. And as men have written some forms of prayer, so they are men that have written the many hundred holy books that are now among us. And preaching and praying are the words and works of men. The singing psalms were turned into metre by men: yea, all your English Bibles were made English by men, and you read and hear no English words but the words of men, though they signify the word of God. The dividing of the Scripture into chapters and verses is the invention and work of men. And I think they were but men that taught you to speak and read. God worketh by man on man, as sociable, fit instruments: and if you despise all in religion that is the work of man, you will despise the word and work of God, and show that you are less than men."

-- *Richard Baxter* (1615-1691)

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