

# SCRIPTURE STUDIES

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

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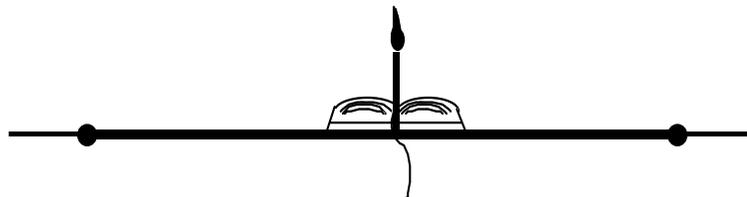
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May God bless you as you study His Word.



## Old Testament Study: Exodus 4:1-17

### Moses Continues to Resist God's Call

<sup>4:1</sup>Moses answered, "What if they do not believe me or listen to me and say, 'The LORD did not appear to you?'"

<sup>2</sup>Then the LORD said to him, "What is that in your hand?"

"A staff," he replied.

<sup>3</sup>The LORD said, "Throw it on the ground."

Moses threw it on the ground and it became a snake, and he ran from it. <sup>4</sup>Then the LORD said to him, "Reach out your hand and take it by the tail." So Moses reached out and took hold of the snake and it turned back into a staff in his hand. <sup>5</sup>"This," said the LORD, "is so that they may believe that the LORD, the God of their fathers—the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob—has appeared to you."

<sup>6</sup>Then the LORD said, "Put your hand inside your cloak." So Moses put his hand into his cloak, and when he took it out, it was leprous, like snow.

<sup>7</sup>"Now put it back into your cloak," he said. So Moses put his hand back into his cloak, and when he took it out, it was restored, like the rest of his flesh.

<sup>8</sup>Then the LORD said, "If they do not believe you or pay attention to the first miraculous sign, they may believe the second. <sup>9</sup>But if they do not believe these two signs or listen to you, take some water from the Nile and pour it on the dry ground. The water you take from the river will become blood on the ground."

<sup>10</sup>Moses said to the LORD, "O Lord, I have never been eloquent, neither in the past nor since you have spoken to your servant. I am slow of speech and tongue."

<sup>11</sup>The LORD said to him, "Who gave man his mouth? Who makes him deaf or mute? Who gives him sight or makes him blind? Is it not I, the LORD? <sup>12</sup>Now go; I will help you speak and will teach you what to say."

<sup>13</sup>But Moses said, "O Lord, please send someone else to do it."

**<sup>14</sup>Then the LORD'S anger burned against Moses and he said, "What about your brother, Aaron the Levite? I know he can speak well. He is already on his way to meet you, and his heart will be glad when he sees you. <sup>15</sup>You shall speak to him and put words in his mouth; I will help both of you speak and will teach you what to do. <sup>16</sup>He will speak to the people for you, and it will be as if he were your mouth and as if you were God to him. <sup>17</sup>But take this staff in your hand so you can perform miraculous signs with it."**

Moses has just received the call of God to bring His people out of Egypt. However, Moses has been resisting God's call. So, God laid out His entire plan to Moses, telling him everything that would happen in Egypt (see Ex. 3:15-22). Moses' response to all this must surely have been exasperating to God: **"Moses answered, 'What if they do not believe me or listen to me and say, 'The Lord did not appear to you?'"** (vs. 4:1). Was Moses listening? Did he hear what God had just said? God had just promised: **"The elders of Israel will listen to you"** (Ex. 3:18). Yet, Moses continued in stubborn resistance.

God, in all patience, graciously gave three signs for Moses to use as proof that God had spoken to him. The first sign: **"Then the Lord said to him, 'What is that in your hand?' 'A staff,' he replied. The Lord said, 'Throw it on the ground.' Moses threw it on the ground and it became a snake, and he ran from it. Then the Lord said to him, 'Reach out your hand and take it by the tail.' So Moses reached out and took hold of the snake and it turned back into a staff in his hand. 'This,' said the Lord, 'is so that they may believe that the Lord, the God of their fathers—the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob—has appeared to you'"** (vss. 2-5). This sign demonstrated the presence of God with Moses, for who else could transform a wooden staff into a living snake. True, as we will see later, the magicians in Pharaoh's court imitated this sign. But key here is that God used Moses own staff, not a prearranged trick staff. In the case of God's sign, there was no illusion involved.

The second sign: **"Then the Lord said, 'Put your hand inside your cloak.' So Moses put his hand into his cloak, and when he took it out, it was leprous, like snow. 'Now put it back into your cloak,' he said. So Moses put his hand back into his cloak and when he took it out, it was restored, like the rest of his flesh. Then the Lord said, 'If they do not believe you or pay attention to the first miraculous sign, they may believe the second'"** (vss. 6-8). God here used Moses' own body, his hand, to perform a sign. Interestingly, but not surprisingly, we have no evidence that Moses used this sign. I can understand that Moses would hesitate to want to turn his own hand leprous!

Many see in this sign a symbol God's redemptive power. Leprosy, in

the Bible, is used as a symbolic type of sin. For God to clear the leprosy, so that the skin showed no more sign of it, is reflective of His ability to forgive our sins, as if they had never occurred. This is truly a sign we should delight in.

The third sign: **“But if they do not believe these two signs or listen to you, take some water from the Nile and pour it on the dry ground. The water you take from the river will become blood on the ground”** (vs. 9). This sign would show that God has power over the existence and sustenance of the Egyptians. It would also show that God has dominion over the false gods of the Egyptians. The Nile River was crucial to the survival of the Egyptians. If God could taint the waters of the Nile, despite the prayers of the Egyptians to their gods, this would demonstrate His power over the false gods.

Even after being given these wonderful signs, Moses continued in his stubbornness: **“Moses said to the LORD, ‘O Lord, I have never been eloquent, neither in the past nor since you have spoken to your servant. I am slow of speech and tongue.’ The LORD said to him, ‘Who gave man his mouth? Who makes him deaf or mute? Who gives him sight or makes him blind? Is it not I, the LORD? Now go; I will help you speak and will teach you what to say’”** (vss. 10–12). Moses felt that he didn’t have the verbal skills to serve God in the way he was being asked. Yet God, who sees the end from the beginning, knew that Moses would be successful, and already told him so. Certainly, God knows what means of service are suitable for us. And even if we are not suited for some means of service, God is certainly capable of giving us the skills to be successful. “Moses completely missed the message of God’s name and God’s miraculous power. **‘I AM’** is all that we need in every circumstance of life, and it’s foolish for us to argue, ‘I am not.’ If God can turn rods into serpents and serpents into rods, if He can cause and cure leprosy, and if He can turn water into blood, then He can enable Moses to speak His Word with power” [Wiersbe, 19]. Indeed, the signs God gave to Moses for the people to see should have been signs for himself as well. As we find out in the Bible, Moses did turn out to be a great leader—one of the greatest the world has known—and any defect he had in verbal skills did not hinder him from being a great leader.

God had answered all of Moses’ protestations, so finally Moses spoke his true feelings: **“But Moses said, ‘O Lord, please send someone else to do it’”** (vs. 13). Moses just did not want to interrupt his peaceful life in Midian, and go and serve his Lord. “Moses calls Him ‘Lord’ and yet refuses to obey His orders” [Wiersbe, 19]. We are lazy. We like the status quo. We are slow to get up and change things in our life, even when our Lord is calling us to. Yet, what is better in life than to serve the Lord of the Universe? What could be more fulfilling than to do His bidding? Years later, do you think that Moses regretted heeding the call of God?

## A Classic Study: Patience in Affliction



### A Classic Study by Richard Baxter (1615–1691)

[Here, we continue a reprint of 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.*

#### Weakness of Grace, Knowledge, Faith, Love, Comfort

It is one of the greatest burdens to an upright soul, to be kept under spiritual languishing and weakness, and to have but a low degree of grace: When knowledge is so small that it will not free us from daily uncertainties about truth, and duty, and sin, and all that plead for their several opinions perplex us; and Scripture seemeth unintelligible to us, and we do but grope after God as in the dark, and are overwhelmed with strange, unsatisfied thoughts of God, and of Christ, and of the world which we are going to; when faith is so weak that we trust Christ for heaven and earth with fear, and unquietness, and distrust, and can scarce tell whether our faith overcome the world, and our trusting Christ for heaven would make us forsake earth and life, rather than hazard it by willful sin; when doubts and fears do tell us that we have little faith.

What a calamity is it when our hopes of heaven do so little rejoice us, that every worldly suffering seems strong enough to quell and quench our joy! Yea, we have more dread than desire, more trouble than joy, when we think of dying, and of the next life!

What a calamity it is, when our love to God, and Christ, and glory, is so small that we are in fear that we love more this body, and worldly prosperity, and pleasure; when all the thoughts of God's essential goodness, His love and mercy to us and others, and all the wonderful love and mercy of our Redeemer, and all the mercies on earth, and promises of heaven, will scarce warm our hearts with love and thankful joy in God! And yet we can easily love, and overlove, our flesh, our house, our lands, our friends, and fanciful amorousness is a common disease.

What a calamity is it that we have no more government of our thoughts to keep out covetousness, pride, and lust, and to cast out Satan's

abominable temptations. And that when we know that God trieth us to exercise our patience, we can no better overcome fear, anger, grief, and discontent. Should we be patient under all this want of grace?

*Answer.* This is to me the greatest burden in this world, and I suppose it is so to all sound Christians, as to considerate trouble of mind, though loss of friends or bodily pains may stir up more passion. That which was before said about uncertainty of salvation must be taken in about this case.

And, 1. Let us make sure of our sincerity before we talk of imperfections; if we can know that we have the truth of special grace, we may know what to say to the case of our infirmities. And for that, still remember what I said before about the sincerity of faith. If you have so well thought of this world and the next, and of Christ, that you are soundly resolved to trust Christ for grace and glory, to the forsaking of all that stands against it, you have saving faith and title to salvation. I opened it before to you by two similitudes, of a patient that practically trusteth his physician, and a poor prisoner that practically trusteth one that promiseth him a lordship in a foreign land. Though you venture with fear and trembling, if you will venture all on Christ, and leave all for Him so far as He requireth you, it is saving faith. Practically trust Him and He will save you.

2. When you have gotten thus far, remember that as you were born in sin, so you too long lived in it. Sin had a long time to darken your understandings, and harden your hearts, and corrupt your wills, and set you at a greater distance from God: and do you think all this must be undone and cured very easily, and in a moment, or as soon as you desire it? It is an unspeakable mercy that it is so far cured, as that you are translated from death to life, and made new creatures, and the heirs of heaven, and moreover, that Christ hath undertaken the perfect cure in His time and way. Grace somewhat imitateth nature: you were not born as soon as conceived, nor were you at ripe age as soon as born. Your growth and strength came by degrees in time; you had not your learning all at once, but by long study. You get not your riches by trading or labor in a few days; your land brings not fruit to perfection as soon as it is sowed, nor your trees as soon as they are grafted or planted: and must not so great a work as the cure and sanctifying of a soul, be done by such degrees?

3. And consider that you must not be mere patients, but also agents in the increase of your grace and strength. It must be had by exercise; the frequent acts must increase the habits, and God will not do it all without you: He hath appointed you means to use, and will try and exercise your obedience therein. As He giveth not life and strength to those that will not take their food, nor the fruit of the earth without our labor, so neither hath He promised to give more grace, save in the patient use of the means which He hath appointed. Time, means, and diligence are needful.

4. And alas! Most Christians are too slothful, and use means negligently, and then look that God should give them as much grace, at their mere wish and prayer, as if they were laborious and diligent. And too many do venture on sin, and so keep under grace by graceless living.

5. And some unskillfully use means for one sort of grace when it is another that they most need, and should use the means accordingly. When they should excite and feed their faith, and hope, and holy love, by the consideration of God's truth and goodness, and His love in Christ, and by heavenly doctrine and thoughts endeavor to get a heavenly mind, some study small controversies, and some perplex themselves with scruples about duties and sins of their own making, and some plunge themselves into confounded and bewildering thoughts, and think over again all Satan's temptations; and some only strive to get a more passionate weeping sorrow; and much neglect all serious endeavors for a believing, loving, joyful soul.

6. You must remember that many Christians grow in grace and do not know it, but think that they go backward, or have none, because they do not sufficiently observe wherein the nature of sanctification doth principally consist: some lay it on passion, and some on memory, and some on the belief of their own sincerity, justification, and salvation, and some on words and free expression, whereas it chiefly consisteth in the estimation of the judgment, the resolution of the will, and the obedience of our lives. If you esteem God's grace and glory better, and sin worse, and the world to be good or bad as it serveth grace or sin, then you grow in understanding. If you are more firmly resolved to place your hopes, and make your choice according to this estimation, and to please God, and secure grace and glory, whatever it cost you, and to avoid willful sin, which is your danger, and to use the world for holy ends, especially if you love wisdom, and holiness, and justice better, and hate sin more than you did heretofore, then your will doth grow in grace. And if you show this will and choice in more obedience of life, avoiding known sin more, and endeavoring to do good, and devoting yourselves more entirely to God, then you grow in holiness of life. Though your memories grow weaker, and though your holy passions and feeling should grow less, and are less able for long meditation, or to keep an order or steadiness in your thoughts, and though your holy passions and feelings should grow less, and are less able for long meditation, or to keep an order or steadiness in your thoughts, and though you want words in prayer and discourse, and though fears, and peevish angeriness, and troubling thoughts should by weakness or temptation get more advantage of you, yet all this stands with rootedness and growth in grace.

7. Forget not what you were heretofore. Had you not formerly a higher esteem of worldly things, and less fear of sinning, than you have

now? Growth in grace may be like the growth of your trees, or corn or flowers, or the shadow on your dial. You do not see these grow or move; but if you come after a sufficient time, you may see that they are grown. We are bigger at age than in childhood, and yet we never saw ourselves grow: it is by insensible degrees. Strong Christians have more knowledge than they had, and a more fixed resolution for God and heaven, and a greater contempt of worldly vanity, and victory over our fleshly desires and willful sin, though they perceive not how these grow.

8. Be thankful that you desire to be better. Those desires (as is afore-said) prove sincerity, and are the earnest of what you do desire, and are a greater blessing than all the riches of the world. God that gave them you will not see them lost. The grace which we have on earth is a desiring, seeking grace. Desires are our best evidence here: **“Blessed are they that hunger and thirst after righteousness”**, for they shall be satisfied hereafter. We must know the difference between earth and heaven: it is there that we shall have all that we desire. Here desiring and seeking is our work: perfection is the prize and crown, which is not to be had till we have done our race and warfare. The womb is but the place of preparation for what is to be enjoyed in the open world; and no great matters are there to be expected. We must not look for more on earth than its part.

9. And when all is done, God is a free agent, and giveth His grace in such variety as He pleases, and doth not give to all alike. As He freely diversifieth nature and common gifts, so doth He several degrees of grace. It is an unspeakable mercy to have so much as shall save us from the hell we deserve, and give us right to life eternal, though we yet are faint through weakness, and have not the strength and comfort which we desire.

10. And though we have yet much corruption left uncured, we have helps appointed us to overcome them; and the exercise of grace against all such enemies is much of its glory, and showeth its amiable worth; as darkness sets out the worth of light, and sickness of health, and death of life. Diseases occasion the honor of our physician. Where sin hath abounded, grace hath superabounded. The whole need not the physician. We must have daily use for Christ, both to pardon us and to cure us. God could have prevented Adam’s fall, but He hath permitted it, and permitteth all the sin in the world, though He cause it not: and He knoweth how to use it to His glory. All souls in heaven were once sinful, saving Christ’s: we must daily be washed in His blood. We shall never perform a duty so innocently as to need no Savior and pardoning grace. Where there is no enemy, there is no war; and where there is no war, there is no victory; and where there is no victory, there is no triumph.

11. And that God who freely pardoned all our reigning sins before conversion, will surely pardon all our mere infirmities, when we renew our

faith and our repentance. He that through Christ can forgive such as were enemies, will forgive a son: and being reconciled by Christ's death, we shall be saved by His life.

Not that any of these considerations should reconcile us to sin, or abate our hatred of it; it must be our grief that anything should cleave to us which is hateful to God, which killed Christ, and which is so contrary to holiness and heaven; but use no such impatience as hindereth the sense of the love of God, or the grace of Christ, or the thankful acknowledgment of His mercy. Fight against sin as well as you can, and serve your Lord as well as you are able: but do not sit down and cry because sin is too strong for you, and because you can serve God no better. Complain to Christ in order to beg His help and grace; but use not complaint instead of endeavor.

Thank God that you are weary of sin, and say with Paul, **"O wretched man! Who shall deliver me?"**, so you will but say next, **"I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord"** (see Rom. 7:24-25). And now that you are weary and heavy laden, come to Christ for ease and rest. And remember, that (when you were ungodly) you could once have endured sin without weariness. Who heard you then impatiently cry out against it? Yea, you were loth to think of leaving it. And look about you on the multitude of the ungodly, and you shall see how far they are from being impatient with their sin, though it be mortal; when they can scarce be patient towards him that would but save them from it. They grudge at God because He will not give them leave to sin, and not because He doth not cure them. Oh how contrary is the impatience of saints and wicked sinners!

12. While you remember what grace you want, remember also both what you have received, and what is promised you, that thankfulness and hope may keep you from discouragement. You are not cured, but you are alive; and Christ hath promised you a cure. In many things we all offend (see James 2:2). **"He that saith he hath no sin, is a liar"** (I John 1:8). Paul tells us that he had not obtained perfection, but he rejoiced that he was pressing towards the mark (see Phil. 3:12,13). **"We may rejoice that our Captain hath overcome the world"** (John 16:33). **"And he will shortly bruise Satan under our feet"** (Rom. 16:20; 7:25). Christ, who cured all bodily diseases on earth, will cure spiritual blindness, lameness, and deadness too, if we have but grace enough to go to Him for more.

13. Lastly, the more weary you are of sin and weakness, and the more desirous you are to know God better, and love Him more, and praise Him with greater cheerfulness and joy, the more you should long to be with Christ. Heaven will deliver you from all imperfection, from all darkness, unbelief, and dullness; from all sad, uncomfortable thoughts, and from all

both alluring and molesting temptations. Oh that we could believe that more strongly, and then our honest impatience with sin and imperfection would but quicken us to the means of our deliverance, and help our joy in the foresight of that blessed change, which will leave no matter of discontent, and will give us more than we could here desire.

But to those who are overmuch dejected at their imperfections, and remaining faults, I add these cautions. 1. See that it be not the disgrace, or the outward troublesome fruits of your sin which grieve you more than the sin itself.

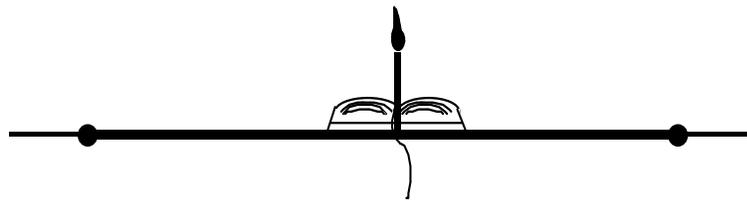
2. Take heed lest, while you complain of your badness, there be no secret pride and hypocrisy to make you angry with those that think you but as bad as you call yourself. It is an odd kind of contradiction, at once to be impatient because we are so bad, and also impatient with them that take us to be so; and not to endure another to say that of us which we say ourselves.

3. The worse you take yourselves and your sins to be, the more you should esteem and desire a Savior and His grace to heal you, and rejoice that a full remedy is at hand, and freely offered you; and be the more thankful for that mercy which is given, and which is promised to so unworthy sinners.

4. Show your impatience with sin and wants by hating sin, and diligent using the means of cure, and not by idle, discouraged, despairing complaints.

5. Remember that our Head is perfect for us: His merits and righteousness are perfect; He is fully perfected in glory; and is it nothing that He is related to us, as our Surety, Savior, and Head? He hath His glory for our good.

6. Remember that no sin or imperfection shall condemn us, but that which we had rather keep than leave, and love more than hate it; and that all things are tolerable which will end in heaven. We groan, being burdened both with sin and sorrow in the flesh; but we wait for full deliverance from the bondage of our corruption, into the glorious liberty of the sons of God.



## New Testament Study: Matthew 16:1-12



### Request for a Sign

<sup>1</sup>The Pharisees and Sadducees came to Jesus and tested Him by asking Him to show them a sign from heaven.

<sup>2</sup>He replied, “When evening comes, you say, ‘It will be fair weather, for the sky is red,’ <sup>3</sup>and in the morning, ‘Today it will be stormy, for the sky is red and overcast.’ You know how to interpret the appearance of the sky, but you cannot interpret the signs of the times. <sup>4</sup>A wicked and adulterous generation looks for a miraculous sign, but none will be given it except the sign of Jonah.” Jesus then left them and went away.

Religious leaders from the two prominent sects of Judaism of the time had a request to make of Jesus: “**The Pharisees and Sadducees came to Jesus and tested Him by asking Him to show them a sign from heaven**” (vs. 1). This is similar to a request the Pharisees made earlier, as recounted in Matthew 12:38. At that time they requested a “**miraculous sign.**” Though Jesus did not accede to their request at the time, He had performed many miraculous signs since then. This time, beyond asking for a miraculous sign, they wanted “**a sign from heaven**”, such as, making the sun stand still, or calling down fire from heaven. “They neglect the signs by which Christ revealed Himself familiarly to them. How much less, then, will they profit from a distant and obscure sign?” [Calvin, 176].

They mistook Jesus’ ministry: He was not a circus act. He did not frivolously perform miraculous signs. Rather, the signs He performed had purpose and meaning. They were service-oriented (such as healings, the feeding of the crowds, etc.), or message-oriented (in order to teach a lesson, such as the cursing of the fig tree, and the changing of the water into wine). “It is fit that the proofs of divine revelation should be chosen by the wisdom of God, not by the follies and fancies of men” [Henry].

Yet, are we any better than the Pharisees and Sadducees? There are many today who say, “If God will just give me some miraculous sign, I will believe in Him.” Those who ask for a sign want to make themselves God

themselves, ordering God around, while not believing the many proofs of His existence.

It was unusual that the Pharisees and Sadducees united in this request, for they were rivals. The Pharisees were a conservative sect that insisted on a legalistic obedience to the Law of God (as interpreted by them); the Sadducees were a liberal sect that did not believe in the supernatural or life after death. Yet they were united in their opposition to Jesus, whose Truth threatened their power over their constituents. “The ungodly may disagree, but their mutual discord never prevents them from conspiring against God and, as if by a pact, reaching out their hands to oppress the truth” [Calvin, 176]. “Satan’s children, how opposite soever one to another, can agree to oppose Christ” [Dickson].

Jesus’ first reply to the request was to tell them, essentially, that they didn’t need any further sign: **“He replied, ‘When evening comes, you say, ‘It will be fair weather, for the sky is red,’ and in the morning, ‘Today it will be stormy, for the sky is red and overcast.’ You know how to interpret the appearance of the sky, but you cannot interpret the signs of the times’”** (vss. 2–3). “For those with eyes to see, the ‘signs of the times’, if not the kind of sign the Pharisees and Sadducees demanded, were already abundant” [Carson, 361]. “The miracles Christ wrought, and the gathering of the people to Him, were plain indications that the kingdom of heaven was at hand, that this was the day of their visitation” [Henry].

Next, Jesus rebuked the Pharisees and Sadducees for their request: **“A wicked and adulterous generation looks for a miraculous sign, but none will be given it except the sign of Jonah.’ Jesus then left them and went away”** (vs. 4). They were **“wicked and adulterous”** because they were unfaithful to the God whom they pledged allegiance to. Their request was not **“wicked”** in itself, but they asked it in the context of a multitude of signs that Jesus had performed. Thus, they chose willfully to ignore all the abundantly clear proofs provided to them that Jesus is the Son of God.

Jesus was not to play circus for them. He would not perform a sign specifically on their behalf. Rather, He spoke of the sign that is the primary sign for all of us concerning who Jesus is: **“...but none will be given it except the sign of Jonah.”** As Jesus said elsewhere: **“For as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of a huge fish, so the Son of Man will be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth”** (Matt. 12:40). The sign for all of us that Jesus is the Son of God is His death for our sins, and His resurrection from the dead. We need no other sign. We do not need God to perform specifically for us, for the sending of His Son to die for us was enough.

By the way, we have noted that this meeting with the Pharisees and Sadducees is similar to the event described in Matthew 12:38ff: Jesus was asked to perform a sign, and He gave essentially the same answer. We know that these were two separate events, for they were recorded by a single author. This teaches us that Jesus would repeat similar teaching in different situations. In the four Gospels, there are various passages that are similar, and yet different enough to cause some to think that they are contradictory. A better explanation for the differences, in many cases, is that the differing passages refer to separate events.

### The Yeast of the Pharisees

<sup>5</sup>When they went across the lake, the disciples forgot to take bread. **“Be careful,”** Jesus said to them. **“Be on your guard against the yeast of the Pharisees and Sadducees.”**

<sup>7</sup>They discussed this among themselves and said, **“It is because we didn’t bring any bread.”**

<sup>8</sup>Aware of their discussion, Jesus asked, **“You of little faith, why are you talking among yourselves about having no bread? <sup>9</sup>Do you still not understand? Don’t you remember the five loaves for the five thousand, and how many basketfuls you gathered? <sup>10</sup>Or the seven loaves for the four thousand, and how many basketfuls you gathered? <sup>11</sup>How is it you don’t understand that I was not talking to you about bread? But be on your guard against the yeast of the Pharisees and Sadducees.” <sup>12</sup>Then they understood that He was not telling them to guard against the yeast used in bread, but against the teaching of the Pharisees and Sadducees.**

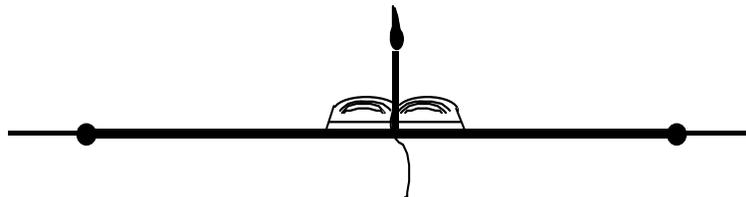
This section, in my mind, demonstrates that Jesus has a sense of humor, for He presented a play-on-words concerning what the disciples were talking about. Jesus must have overheard the disciples speaking about not having brought bread: **“When they went across the lake, the disciples forgot to take bread. ‘Be careful,’ Jesus said to them. ‘Be on your guard against the yeast of the Pharisees and Sadducees’”** (vss. 5–6). Yeast was a familiar symbol of insidious corruption, used many times in the Bible as such, for it infiltrates internally, and spreads itself throughout the dough.

Jesus, in the play-on-words, related the physical bread the disciples were concerned about, to the spiritual yeast of the Pharisees. The play-

on-words was lost on the disciples. They thought Jesus was talking about literal bread: **“They discussed this among themselves and said, ‘It is because we didn’t bring any bread’”** (vs. 7). Apparently, the disciples thought that Jesus was warning them not to accept bread from the Pharisees and Sadducees. Such a warning would have been absurd, and had Jesus meant that, would have gone against His teaching that says it is not what you eat that corrupts. The disciples were implying that Jesus was falling into the same kind of ridiculousness as the Pharisees by saying there was something unholy about physical bread from the Pharisees.

Jesus mildly rebuked the disciples for their mistaken interpretation of what He said: **“Aware of their discussion, Jesus asked, ‘You of little faith, why are you talking among yourselves about having no bread? ... How is it you don’t understand that I was not talking to you about bread? But be on your guard against the yeast of the Pharisees and Sadducees’”** (vss. 8, 11). Interestingly, Jesus did not spell out the entire meaning of what He said, but gave them the hint that He was not speaking of physical bread. He then let them figure out the rest: **“Then they understood that He was not telling them to guard against the yeast used in bread, but against the teaching of the Pharisees and Sadducees”** (vs. 12). The insidious corruption of the Pharisees and Sadducees was their wrong teaching. It was all the more dangerous because it was coming from the primary religious leaders of the time. “Disciples are in most danger from hypocrites; against those that are openly vicious they stand upon their guard, but against Pharisees, who are great pretenders to devotion, and Sadducees, who pretend to a free and impartial search after truth, they commonly lie unguarded: and therefore the caution is doubted” [Henry].

The wrong interpretation of Jesus’ comment by His own disciples demonstrates that we all must take care when interpreting the words of Christ, lest we wrongly interpret them. “Readily are our Lord’s words mistaken, even by disciples, and upon a mistake, wrong conclusions are drawn, and so the intent of Christ’s words are lost” [Dickson]. Diligent study and prayer for guidance are greatly needed when interpreting what Jesus said.



# A Topical Study: Self-Examination



## The Necessity of Self-Examination, pt. 3 by Jonathan Edwards (1703-1758)

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).

### Section 2

*Why many live in sin, and yet not know it.*

That the knowing whether we do not live in some way of sin is attended with difficulty, is not because the rules of judging in such a case are not plain or plentiful. God hath abundantly taught us what we ought, and what we ought not, to do; and the rules by which we are to walk are often set before us in the preaching of the word. So that the difficulty of knowing whether there be any wicked way in us, is not for want of external light, or for want of God's having told us plainly and abundantly what are wicked ways. But that many persons live in ways which are displeasing to God, and yet are not sensible of it, may arise from the following things:

1. From the blinding deceitful nature of sin. The heart of man is full of sin and corruption, and that corruption is of an exceedingly darkening, blinding nature. Sin always carries a degree of darkness with it; and the more it prevails, the more it darkens and deludes the mind. — It is from hence that the knowing whether there be any wicked way in us is a difficult thing. The difficulty is not at all for want of light without us, not at all because the word of God is not plain, or the rules not clear; but it is because of the darkness within us. The light shines clear enough around us, but the fault is in our eyes; they are darkened and blinded by a pernicious distemper.

Sin is of a deceitful nature, because, so far as it prevails, so far it gains the inclination and will, and that sways and biases the judgment. So far as any lust prevails, so far it biases the mind to approve of it. So far as any sin

sways the inclination or will, so far that sin seems pleasing and good to the man; and that which is pleasing, the mind is prejudiced to think is right. — Hence when any lust hath so gained upon a man, as to get him into a sinful way or practice; it having gained his will, also prejudices his understanding. And the more irregular a man walks, the more will his mind probably be darkened and blinded, because by so much the more doth sin prevail.

Hence many men who live in ways which are not agreeable to the rules of God's word, yet are not sensible of it; and it is a difficult thing to make them so, because the same lust that leads them into that evil way, blinds them in it. — Thus, if a man live a way of malice, or envy, the more malice or envy prevails, the more will it blind his understanding to approve of it. The more a man hates his neighbour, the more will he be disposed to think that he has just cause to hate him, and that his neighbour is hateful, and deserves to be hated, and that it is not his duty to love him. So if a man live in any way of lasciviousness, the more his impure lust prevails, the more sweet and pleasant will it make the sin appear, and so the more will he be disposed and prejudiced to think there is no evil in it.

So the more a man lives in a way of covetousness, or the more inordinately he desires the profits of the world the more will he think himself excusable in so doing, and the more will he think that he has a necessity of those things, and cannot do without them. And if they be necessary, then he is excusable for eagerly desiring them. The same might be shown of all the lusts which are in men's hearts. By how much the more they prevail, by so much the more do they blind the mind, and dispose the judgment to approve of them. All lusts are deceitful lusts. **“That ye put off, concerning the former conversation, the old man which is corrupt according to the deceitful lusts”** (Eph. 4:22). And even godly men may for a time be blinded and deluded by a lust, so far as to live in a way which is displeasing to God.

The lusts of men's hearts — prejudicing them in favour of sinful practices, to which those lusts tend, and in which they delight — stir up carnal reason, and put men, with all the subtlety of which they are capable, to invent pleas and argument to justify such practices. When men are very strongly inclined and tempted to any wicked practice, and conscience troubles them about it, they will rack their brains to find out arguments to stop the mouth of conscience, and to make themselves believe that they may lawfully proceed in that practice.

When men have entered upon an ill practice, and proceeded in it, then their self-love prejudices them to approve of it. Men do not love to condemn themselves; they are prejudiced in their own favour, and in favor of whatever is found in themselves. Hence they will find out good names by which to call their evil dispositions and practices; they will make them

virtuous, or at least will make them innocent. Their covetousness they will call prudence and diligence in business. If they rejoice at another's calamity, they pretend it is because they hope it will do him good, and will humble him. If they indulge in excessive drinking, it is because their constitutions require it. If they talk against and backbite their neighbor, they call it zeal against sin; it is because they would bear a testimony against such wickedness. If they set up their wills to oppose others in public affairs, then they call their willfulness conscience, or respect to the public good. — Thus they find good names for all their evil ways.

Men are very apt to bring their principles to their practices, and not their practices to their principles, as they ought to do. They, in their practice, comply not with their consciences; but all their strife is to bring their consciences to comply with their practice.

On the account of this deceitfulness of sin, and because we have so much sin dwelling in our hearts, it is a difficult thing to pass a true judgment on our own ways and practices. On this account we should make diligent search, and be much concerned to know whether there be not some wicked way in us. **“Take heed, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief in departing from the living God. But exhort one another daily, while it is called today, lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin”** (Hebrews 3:12-13).

Men can more easily see faults in others than they can in themselves. When they see others out of the way, they will presently condemn them, when perhaps they do, or have done, the same, or the like, themselves, and in themselves justify it. Men can discern much in others eyes, better than they can beams in their own. **“Every way of man is right in his own eyes”** (Prov. 21:2). The heart in this matter is exceedingly deceitful. **“The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked: who can know it?”** (Jer. 17:9). We ought not therefore to trust in our own hearts in this matter, but to keep a jealous eye on ourselves, to pry into our own hearts and ways, and to cry to God that He would search us. **“He that trusteth his own heart is a fool”** (Prov. 28:26).

2. Satan also sets in with our deceitful lusts, and labours to blind us in this matter. He is continually endeavouring to lead us into sinful ways, and sets in with carnal reason to flatter us in such ways, and to blind the conscience. He is the prince of darkness; he labours to blind and deceive; it hath been his work ever since he began it with our first parents.

3. Sometimes men are not sensible, because they are stupefied through custom. Custom in an evil practice stupefies the mind, so that it makes any way of sin, which at first was offensive to conscience, after a while, to seem harmless.

4. Sometimes persons live in ways of sin, and are not sensible of it, because they are blinded by common custom, and the examples of others.

There are so many who go into the practice, and it is so common a custom, that it is esteemed little or no discredit to a man; it is little testified against. This causes some sins to appear innocent which are very displeasing to God, and abominable in His sight. Perhaps we see them practiced by those of whom we have a high esteem, by our superiors, and those who are accounted wise men. This greatly prepossesses the mind in favour of them, and takes off the sense of their evil. Or if they be observed to be commonly practiced by those who are accounted godly men, men of experience in religion, this tends greatly to harden the heart, and blind the mind with respect to any evil practice.

5. Persons are in great danger of living in ways of sin and not being sensible of it, for want of duly regarding and considering their duty in the full extent of it. There are some who hear of the necessity of reforming from all sins, and attending all duties, and will set themselves to perform some particular duties, at the same time neglecting others. Perhaps their thoughts will be wholly taken up about religious duties, such as prayer in secret, reading the Scriptures and other good books, going to public worship and giving diligent attention, keeping the sabbath, and serious meditation. They seem to regard these things, as though they comprised their duty in its full extent, and as if this were their whole work; and moral duties towards their neighbours, their duties in the relations in which they stand, their duties as husbands or wives, as brethren or sisters, or their duties as neighbours, seem not to be considered by them.

They consider not the necessity of those things: and when they hear of earnestly seeking salvation in a way of diligent attendance on all duties, they seem to leave those out of their thoughts, as if they were not meant, nor any other duties, except reading, and praying, and keeping the Sabbath, and the like. Or, if they do regard some parts of their moral duty, it may be other branches of it are not considered. Thus if they be just in their dealings, yet perhaps they neglect deeds of charity. They know they must not defraud their neighbour; they must not lie, they must not commit uncleanness; but seem not to consider what an evil it is to talk against others lightly, or to take up a reproach against them, or to contend and quarrel with them, or to live contrary to the rules of the gospel in their family-relations, or not to instruct their children or servants.

Many men seem to be very conscientious in some things, in some branches of their duty on which they keep their eye, when other important branches are entirely neglected, and seem not to be noticed by them. They regard not their duty in the full extent of it.

## A Study in Psalms: Psalm 61



### Psalm 61 - Hear My Cry, O God

For the director of music.  
With stringed instruments. Of David.

- <sup>1</sup>Hear my cry, O God;  
listen to my prayer.
- <sup>2</sup>From the ends of the earth I call to You,  
I call as my heart grows faint;  
Lead me to the rock  
that is higher than I.
- <sup>3</sup>For You have been my refuge,  
a strong tower against the foe.
- <sup>4</sup>I long to dwell in Your tent forever  
and take refuge  
in the shelter of Your wings. *Selah*
- <sup>5</sup>For You have heard my vows, O God;  
You have given me the heritage  
of those who fear Your name.
- <sup>6</sup>Increase the days of the king's life,  
his years for many generations.
- <sup>7</sup>May he be enthroned in God's presence forever;  
appoint Your love and faithfulness  
to protect him.
- <sup>8</sup>Then will I ever sing praise to Your name  
and fulfill my vows day after day.

The inscription of the psalm does not specify the occasion, but from the psalm itself, we can infer it was written by a king (see vs. 6), probably in exile (see vs. 2). "The supposition which best agrees with all the circumstances alluded to in the psalm is that it was composed by David when he was driven into exile on the rebellion of Absalom, and that it was composed when he was still beyond the Jordan (see II Sam. 17:22)" [Barnes].

As with many psalms, this one starts out with a prayer of desperation: "Hear my cry, O God; listen to my prayer" (vs. 1). "The best expedient

for a sad soul is to run to God by prayer for comfort" [Dickson, 361]. David well knew that God was His first and best hope in time of trouble. And this was a time of trouble for David, as demonstrated by his repeated petition: **"Hear my cry... listen to my prayer."** "Faith's greatest triumphs are achieved in her heaviest trials" [Spurgeon].

David was on the run at the time, and far away from home: **"From the ends of the earth I call to You, I call as my heart grows faint; lead me to the rock that is higher than I"** (vs. 2). David was losing hope, as his heart grew **"faint"**, but God is our ever-present hope, even **"from the ends of the earth."** No one is out of His reach. David knew that salvation was out of his own reach, thus he prayed for God to lead him to the rock of salvation that was beyond his grasp: **"Lead me to the rock that is higher than I."**

David had evidence that his prayer would be answered: **"For You have been my refuge, a strong tower against the foe"** (vs. 3). His expectation of deliverance was based on his past experiences of trusting in God, and then being delivered. "God had thus shown that He had power to deliver him; and it might be expected that God, who is unchangeable, and who had interposed, would manifest the same traits of character still, and would not leave him now" [Barnes].

Some would turn to God only in times of trouble. David desired to be with God constantly, and forever: **"I long to dwell in Your tent forever and take refuge in the shelter of Your wings"** (vs. 4). Some would use God, take advantage of His mercy and grace, and then, when not in need, turn their backs on Him and live their own lives. This was not David. His heart had the greatest desire to seek God and dwell with Him. As he declared elsewhere: **"One thing I ask of the LORD, this is what I seek: that I may dwell in the house of the LORD all the days of my life, to gaze upon the beauty of the LORD and to seek him in his temple"** (Ps. 27:4). "True consolation standeth not in earthly things, but in things heavenly, and things having nearest relation thereto; for David's comfort was not so much that he should be brought to the kingdom, as that he should be brought to the tabernacle, and to heaven by that means" [Dickson, 363].

David's desire to **"take refuge in the shelter of [God's] wings"** was based partly on his knowledge of God's protection of His people throughout the ages: **"For You have heard my vows, O God; You have given me the heritage of those who fear Your name"** (vs. 5). Those who fear God, who live in obedience to His Holy Word, have a common heritage, which includes present and future blessings, angels as ministering spirits, and the assurance that all things work together for the good. What a blessing, to be a child of God!

The process of praying worked to change David's focus from the temporal to the eternal, from the problems of earth to the glories of heaven:

**“Increase the days of the king’s life, his years for many generations. May he be enthroned in God’s presence forever; appoint Your love and faithfulness to protect him”** (vss. 6–7). It is true, that God **“increased the days”** of David’s life on earth (especially in light of all the warfare, strife, and rebellion that David faced), but David here was looking more toward eternal life in God’s presence. And should not that be our primary goal in this life? To please God, so as to gain eternal life? Are not all of our wants and needs in this life subsidiary to this?

“David, in this psalm, as in many others, begins with a sad heart, but concludes with an air of pleasantness—begins with prayers and tears, but ends with songs of praise” [Henry]: **“Then will I ever sing praise to Your name and fulfill my vows day after day”** (vs. 8). “Note, God’s preservation of us calls upon us to praise Him; and therefore we should desire to live, that we may praise Him” [Henry].

#### Gifts Without Season

Lord, I would thank You for these things:  
 Not sunlight only, but sullen rain;  
 Not only laughter with lifted wings,  
 But the heavy muted hands of pain.

Lord, I would thank You for so much:  
 The toil no less than the well-earned ease;  
 The glory always beyond our touch  
 That bows the head and bends the knees.

Lord, there are gifts of brighter gold  
 Than the deepest mine or mint can yield:  
 Friendship and love and a dream to hold,  
 The look that heartened, the word that healed.

Lord, I would thank You for eyes to see  
 Miracles in our everyday earth:  
 The colors that crowd monotony,  
 The flame of the humblest flower’s birth.

Lord, I would thank You for gifts without season:  
 The flash of a thought like a banner unfurled,  
 The splendor of faith and the sparkle of reason,  
 The tolerant mind in a turbulent world.

-- Joseph Auslander (b. 1897)

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### Proper Christian Character

"Some men are like the leaves of a tree, which every wind sets a-shaking and trembling; or like a bone out of joint, which a man cannot stir without pain: if the world do but frown upon them, you may see it in their faces, they are quite dejected with sorrow. Oh, how heavy presently are their hearts, as if they had lost their heaven! It is to be feared that bough is rotten, which breaketh if but a little weight be hung upon it. A godly man should be like a rock, immovable, though high winds and boisterous waves of providence blow and beat upon him; and like a die, however he be thrown, always to fall upon a square. The traveller need not murmur, though his inn afford him but mean fare, and a hard bed, when he knoweth that he must be gone next morning. The ox is not happier, which hath two or three mountains to graze on, than the bee which feedeth upon that dew which falleth daily from the storehouse of heaven. If thou hast secured thine everlasting estate, the boundless God is thy portion, and surely then thou mayest be like a spring full, under the most scorching providence."

-- George Swinmock (1627 - 1673)

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