

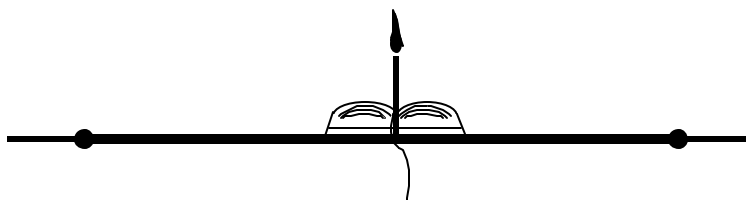
Scripture Studies

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

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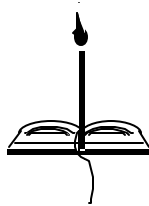
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May God bless you as you study His Word.



Old Testament Study: Exodus 5:1-21

Moses Goes Before Pharaoh

¹Afterward Moses and Aaron went to Pharaoh and said, "This is what the LORD, the God of Israel, says: 'Let My people go, so that they may hold a festival to me in the desert.'"

²Pharaoh said, "Who is the LORD, that I should obey Him and let Israel go? I do not know the LORD and I will not let Israel go."

³Then they said, "The God of the Hebrews has met with us. Now let us take a three-day journey into the desert to offer sacrifices to the LORD our God, or He may strike us with plagues or with the sword."

⁴But the king of Egypt said, "Moses and Aaron, why are you taking the people away from their labor? Get back to your work!" ⁵Then Pharaoh said, "Look, the people of the land are now numerous, and you are stopping them from working."

⁶That same day Pharaoh gave this order to the slave drivers and foremen in charge of the people: ⁷"You are no longer to supply the people with straw for making bricks; let them go and gather their own straw. ⁸But require them to make the same number of bricks as before; don't reduce the quota. They are lazy; that is why they are crying out, 'Let us go and sacrifice to our God.' ⁹Make the work harder for the men so that they keep working and pay no attention to lies."

¹⁰Then the slave drivers and the foremen went out and said to the people, "This is what Pharaoh says: 'I will not give you any more straw. ¹¹Go and get your own straw wherever you can find it, but your work will not be reduced at all.'" ¹²So the people scattered all over Egypt to gather stubble to use for straw. ¹³The slave drivers kept pressing them, saying, "Complete the work required of you for each day, just as when you had straw." ¹⁴The Israelite foremen appointed by Pharaoh's slave drivers were beaten and were asked, "Why didn't you meet your quota of bricks yesterday or today, as before?"

¹⁵Then the Israelite foremen went and appealed to Pharaoh: "Why have you treated your servants this

way? ¹⁶Your servants are given no straw, yet we are told, 'Make bricks!' Your servants are being beaten, but the fault is with your own people."

¹⁷Pharaoh said, "Lazy, that's what you are— lazy! That is why you keep saying, 'Let us go and sacrifice to the LORD.' ¹⁸Now get to work. You will not be given any straw, yet you must produce your full quota of bricks."

¹⁹The Israelite foremen realized they were in trouble when they were told, "You are not to reduce the number of bricks required of you for each day."

²⁰When they left Pharaoh, they found Moses and Aaron waiting to meet them, ²¹and they said, "May the LORD look upon you and judge you! You have made us a stench to Pharaoh and his officials and have put a sword in their hand to kill us."

²²Moses returned to the LORD and said, "O Lord, why have You brought trouble upon this people? Is this why You sent me? ²³Ever since I went to Pharaoh to speak in Your name, he has brought trouble upon this people, and You have not rescued Your people at all."

Moses, having heeded God's call and having secured the support of the God's people, was now ready to act: "**Afterward Moses and Aaron went to Pharaoh and said, 'This is what the LORD, the God of Israel, says: 'Let my people go, so that they may hold a festival to me in the desert''**" (vs. 1). So began Moses' conflict with Pharaoh. Moses and Aaron showed a bit of courage in seeking an audience directly with such a powerful man as Pharaoh, with such a bold message. And it is somewhat surprising that Pharaoh, the leader of Egypt, would receive Moses and Aaron. It is quite probable, as fictionalized accounts of the confrontation have posited, that Pharaoh knew and remembered Moses, who grew up in the palace court.

Note that Moses began by stating to Pharaoh what "**the LORD, the God of Israel**" said. Moses made it clear from the very beginning that the Lord of the Universe commissioned him, and spoke through him. Moses uses the name of the Lord, "**YHWH**" or "**Jehovah**" (translated "**LORD**" in this version of the Bible, with SMALL CAPS), as given to him on the mountain (see Ex. 3:14–15). Also, significantly, Moses calls God, "**The God of Israel**". This is the first time this term for God is used when referring to Israel the nation (the term had been previously used when referring to Israel the man). The use of this name here symbolizes that this is the beginning of the gathering of God's people into a nation.

God's request through Moses was a direct affront to Pharaoh. The Lord said: "**Let My people go.**" Pharaoh thought that the Israelites were his people. God would show him differently.

God, of course, did not have to appeal to Pharaoh to let the Israelites

go. “It was, indeed, possible for God to overwhelm him at once, by a single nod, so that he should even fall down dead at the very sight of Moses; but He will himself presently declare, He, *in the first place*, chose more clearly to lay open His power; for if Pharaoh had either voluntarily yielded, or had been overcome without effort, the glory of the victory would not have been so illustrious. *In the second place*, He wished this monument to exist of His singular love towards His elect people; for by contending so perseveringly and so forcibly against the obstinacy of this most powerful king, He gave no doubtful proof of His love towards His Church. *In the third place*, He wished to accustom His servants in all ages to patience, lest they should faint in their minds, if He does not immediately answer their prayers, and, at every moment, relieve them from their distresses. *In the fourth place*, He wished to show that, against all the strivings and devices of Satan, against the madness of the ungodly, and all worldly hinderances, His hand must always prevail; and to leave us no room to doubt, but that whatever we see opposing us will at length be overcome by him. *In the fifth place*, By detecting the illusions of Satan and the magicians, He would render His Church more wary, that she might carefully watch against such devices, and that her faith might continue invincible against all the machinations of error. *Finally*, He would convince Pharaoh and the Egyptians, that their folly was not to be excused by any pretense of ignorance; and, at the same time, by this example, He would show us how horrible a darkness possesses the minds of the reprobate, when He has deprived them of the light of His Spirit. These things must be attentively observed in the course of the narrative, if we desire to profit by it” [Calvin].

Pharaoh’s initial response to Moses was not unexpected: **“Pharaoh said, ‘Who is the LORD, that I should obey Him and let Israel go? I do not know the LORD and I will not let Israel go’”** (vs. 2). “Ignorance and contempt of God are at the bottom of all the wickedness that is in the world. Men know not the Lord, or have very low and mean thoughts of Him, and therefore they obey not His voice, nor will let anything go for Him” [Henry]. Pharaoh was ignorant of the Lord at that time, but he would not be for long. God was to reveal Himself to Pharaoh in a painful way—painful because of Pharaoh’s hardheartedness.

It is not surprising that Pharaoh showed contempt for the Lord, for Pharaoh considered himself a god. To him, the Israelites were his people, and he was not about to acknowledge that there was a greater god than himself. Pharaoh was also not about to obey a god whom he considered inferior to himself. Pharaoh must certainly have measured the state of the Israelites as slaves, and considered that their God was weak and powerless.

Beyond this, Pharaoh simply did not want to let the people go. He emphatically stated: **“I will not let Israel go”** (vs. 2). This stubbornness in desiring to sinfully hold the children of Israel in bondage was to harden

Pharaoh's heart such that, despite God's display of mighty power, Pharaoh would continue in his ignorance and contempt of God. Pharaoh was stuck in his sin, and he did not want to change. This has been the case throughout the ages. People continue in their ignorant state toward God, not because there are not manifold proofs of His existence, but because they want to continue in their sin. As Jesus said: **"This is the verdict: Light has come into the world, but men loved darkness instead of light because their deeds were evil. Everyone who does evil hates the light, and will not come into the light for fear that his deeds will be exposed"** (John 3:19–20).

Although God's ultimate purpose was to have the Israelites leave Egypt for good, Moses' first request was much more limited in scope: **"Then they said, 'The God of the Hebrews has met with us. Now let us take a three-day journey into the desert to offer sacrifices to the Lord our God, or He may strike us with plagues or with the sword'"** (vs. 3). This was not an unreasonable request to make at all: a mere three days off work, and that to accomplish the honorable purpose of worshipping the Lord. Curiously, Moses added to the request, a threat by God upon the people of Israel: **"... or He may strike us with plagues or with the sword."** This clause, I believe, was something added by Moses, and not sanctioned by God, for we have no record of such a threat by God. I cannot believe that God would punish the Israelites for failure to worship, especially since they were constrained from doing so by Pharaoh. Perhaps Moses wanted to make God sound ominous and threatening to Pharaoh, but it is never a good idea to misrepresent the character of God. In reality, it was Pharaoh who was in danger of experiencing God's wrath. It could be that, at that time, Moses was afraid to threaten Pharaoh.

Despite the reasonableness of the request, Pharaoh rejected it: **"But the king of Egypt said, 'Moses and Aaron, why are you taking the people away from their labor? Get back to your work!' Then Pharaoh said, 'Look, the people of the land are now numerous, and you are stopping them from working'"** (vss. 4–5). Pharaoh's rejection of their request demonstrated his wickedness.

And his wickedness was further demonstrated by his punishment upon the people for making the request: **"That same day Pharaoh gave this order to the slave drivers and foremen in charge of the people: 'You are no longer to supply the people with straw for making bricks; let them go and gather their own straw. But require them to make the same number of bricks as before; don't reduce the quota. They are lazy; that is why they are crying out, 'Let us go and sacrifice to our God.' Make the work harder for the men so that they keep working and pay no attention to lies'"** (vss. 7–9). Pharaoh was less interested in the productivity that he could get out of the people, than he was with

demonstrating to the people that he was god over them. Pharaoh answered the reasonable request of the Israelites, with an unreasonable, and counter-productive, demand on them.

This command of Pharaoh's was put into effect (see vss. 10–12), and Pharaoh's slave drivers enforced it: **“The slave drivers kept pressing them, saying ‘Complete the work required of you for each day, just as when you had straw.’ The Israelite foremen appointed by Pharaoh’s slave drivers were beaten and were asked, ‘Why didn’t you meet your quota of bricks yesterday or today, as before?’”** (vss. 13–14). Instead of appealing to God, whose people they truly were, the Israelite foremen went to Pharaoh for relief: **“Then the Israelite foremen went and appealed to Pharaoh: ‘Why have you treated your servants this way? Your servants are given no straw, yet we are told, “Make bricks!” Your servants are being beaten, but the fault is with your own people”** (vss. 15–16). But Pharaoh had no sympathy for them, nor did he offer any relief: **“Pharaoh said, ‘Lazy, that’s what you are—lazy! That is why you keep saying, “Let us go and sacrifice to the LORD.” Now get to work. You will not be given any straw, yet you must produce your full quota of bricks”** (vss. 17–18). They, of course, went to the wrong place for relief. God was to be their Savior, and they should have appealed to Him. Our God is a merciful and loving Lord. Pharaoh, clearly, was not.

The Israelite foremen proceeded to blame Moses and Aaron for their troubles: **“When they left Pharaoh, they found Moses and Aaron waiting to meet them, and they said, ‘May the LORD look upon you and judge you! You have made us a stench to Pharaoh and his officials and have put a sword in their hand to kill us”** (vss. 20–21). This reflects the weakness of their faith. The people had recently **“bowed down and worshiped”** at hearing of Moses’ mission, because **“the LORD was concerned about them and had seen their misery”** (see Ex. 4:31). Now, at the first sign of trouble, they blame Moses for all of their woes. And not only do they blame Moses, they believe that God is against Moses, for they say: **“May the LORD look upon you and judge you!”**

Unbelief is contagious, for we see Moses’ faith also wavering: **“Moses returned to the LORD and said, ‘O Lord, why have you brought trouble upon this people? Is this why you sent me? Ever since I went to Pharaoh to speak in Your name, he has brought trouble upon this people, and You have not rescued Your people at all”** (vss. 22–23). At the first sign of trouble, Moses was prepared to give up. But at least Moses, in his troubled state of mind, appealed directly to God.

A Classic Study: Patience in Affliction



[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 Does Not Bless the Labors of Our Callings - II, by Richard Baxter

[Continued from the June/July 2003 issue.]

II. The second cause of frustration is to have children and servants who follow not our Lord. I confess it is a grievous case to bring up children who will be slaves of Satan, plagues to the church, and firebrands in hell; and to speak to them in vain, as blocks or mad-men. But good men have lived comfortably that had bad children: Adam had a Cain, Noah had a Ham, Abraham had an Ishmael, Isaac had an Esau, Jacob's sons greatly sinned; Eli had a Hophni and Phinehas, Samuel's sons forsook their father's way; David had an Amnon and an Absalom, Solomon had a Rehoboam, Hezekiah had a Manasseh, Job justly feared his sons' forgetting God in their fullness, and lost them in it: Christ saith, the son shall be against the father (see Matt. 13:12).

And if you have but one good child, you owe great thanks to God for that. If a minister must not deny God his thanks, nor himself his comforts, though most of his flock prove obstinate and perish; neither must parents be unthankful or uncomfortable, if most of their children should be obstinate and perish, if God permit it, who hath more interest in them than you have; you must submit, and take comfort in your good desires and faithful duty: but oh see carefully that you neglect not love, and prudent diligence, and good example, and that you keep out of tempting company, and keep under suitable means.

III. And it is as near a trial, when a husband cannot convert a wicked wife, nor a wife a wicked husband, but one must lie in the bosom of a slave of Satan, and an enemy of Christ, and no persuasion will do such good. The nearness maketh the affliction very great, such as few that have not had sad experience of it can know. It is a very hard thing to love such with a true conjugal love, who have no true loveliness of soul, but hate the holy ways of Christ; and it is not easy to keep up innocence, and godliness, and peace, under the constant opposition of one so near.

But yet this must be patiently borne, when it cannot be remedied. For,

1. Usually it is a just correction for a sinful choice, which must be repented of; and it is a mercy that your repentance hath some help.

2. It may be such a constant exercise of your grace, especially patience and prudence, as may render you better and stronger Christians, than those that have less exercise by trials.

3. The greatness of the temptations must cause you to double your watchfulness and resolutions against the sins which you will be tempted to, and to perform all the duties of our place. As, (1). See that no pretence of love, or pleasing, or obedience, draw you to imitate a husband or a wife in sin, and to become as bad as they, or to receive any error from them, or grow cold to holy duties. Some women that have erroneous husbands cannot tell how to love and please them, without being flattered or drawn into their errors; strong constant trials need strong and constant watch and resolution: for if you be overcome to be as they, it is a thousand times worse than all the grief that you have by them.

(2). See that their badness destroy not conjugal affections towards them: those may be loved as husbands or wives, who cannot be loved as sincere Christians.

(3). See that you exceed mere carnal persons in all the duties of your relations. If your difference and grief do cast you into sourness and unpleasing, discontented conversation, or if you be as peevish and forward as common persons, you will be a scandal to those that you should win, and drive them further from religion and salvation. You must show, if you are wives, more love, and meekness, and patience, and obedience, than carnal persons do, as well as more forwardness in religion. Forward, impatient wives do harden many ill husbands in their sin. It hath much pleased me to hear a husband saying of a good wife, I differ from my wife in religion and church orders; I go to one church, and she to another: I think she is too precise and strict; but I think there is not a better wife, a better mother, and a better mistress in the land. A good Christian must be good in all relations.

(4). Continue prayers and winning endeavors while there is hope.

(5). And let the sense of another's sin and misery provoke you to be thankful to God for His grace, and that He hath not left you to the like.

IV. And as to the next case, (when God blasteth our labors and estates, and prospereth not our callings), it is a usual trial: some are ruined by deceivers and breaking tradesmen, some by losses at sea, some by suretyship, some by fire, some by false servants, some by prodigal sons, some by soldiers, some by unjust suits at law, some overreached in bargains about land; and divers other ways there are by which the rich have been brought to poverty, (to say nothing of gaming, luxury, and such vice, which belongs not to this present case) and by which lawful means of living want success.

And here, 1. It is your duty to see that there be no guilt of any other unpardoned sin which God punisheth this way. Sometimes an estate is blasted by God, because it was unlawfully got by ancestors: sometimes the

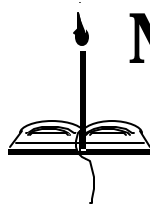
owner is guilty of former defrauding others, and hath made no restitution; sometimes God thus punisheth some other secret sin, as fornication, lying, flesh-pleasing, and such like. Search deep, and see that no such guilt be unrepented of, and be as a moth or fire to consume your wealth.

2. Especially search lest your hearts grow secretly into a worldly disposition, and too great hopes of riches and prosperity, and too great a desire after plenty, and too much pleasure in the possession, or the hopes of it: if this be your case, it is God's great mercy to blast all to you, and to break your idol, and to fire you out of the garrison that you trust. They that trust in riches, Christ tells you, are as hardly saved as for a **"camel to go through the eye of a needle"**: and it is men's hope which is called their trust. When you hope for more from riches than they can give, you are said to trust in them. If ever God save you, He will save you from this worldly mind and love: and sure prosperity is not the likeliest way to that; but rather withering the object of your hopes.

3. However, make this use of your crosses, to be more weaned from the world, and more careful to lay up a treasure in heaven, where fire, rust, or moth corrupts not, and thieves, pirates, or soldiers cannot steal, and then your loss, be it never so great, is made your gain.

4. And let your crosses and frustrations call you to exercise the graces suitable to your condition; to renew repentance, submission to God's will, prayer and dependence for your daily bread, abatement of pride, not disdain the lowest employment, nor to be beholden to others: and if you can follow Christ and His apostles in a holy poverty, you shall quickly be above contempt and want. And let it make you ply that calling and work which will never disappoint you: believe and hope strongly, pray earnestly, obey diligently, be steadfast, unmovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as your labor shall not be in vain, though all your worldly wealth be blasted.

I conclude all this case of labor frustration, and hopes cast down, with a necessary warning: Judge of God's love to you by the great and sure tokens of His love, and not by uncertain, transitory things. If God loved those best that prosper most in honor and wealth, tyrants, and the most luxurious, wicked men, would have the best proof of His love. If your souls prosper in the increase of faith, and in sweeter or desiring thoughts of heaven, and in delight in God and holiness, and in victory over all your carnal affections and discontents, and in a more willing obedience to all God's laws, and in a word, in a fuller compliance of your wills to the will of God, then you are truly prosperous persons, and have the certain tokens of the love of God.



New Testament Study: Matthew 16:21-28

Peter Stumbles

²¹From that time on Jesus began to explain to His disciples that He must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things at the hands of the elders, chief priests and teachers of the law, and that He must be killed and on the third day be raised to life.

²²Peter took Him aside and began to rebuke Him. “Never, Lord!” he said. “This shall never happen to you!”

²³Jesus turned and said to Peter, “Get behind me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to me; you do not have in mind the things of God, but the things of men.”

²⁴Then Jesus said to His disciples, “If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. ²⁵For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me will find it. ²⁶What good will it be for a man if he gains the whole world, yet forfeits his soul? Or what can a man give in exchange for his soul? ²⁷For the Son of Man is going to come in His Father’s glory with His angels, and then He will reward each person according to what He has done.

²⁸I tell you the truth, some who are standing here will not taste death before they see the Son of Man coming in His kingdom.”

In the previous section, Peter triumphed, as he answered the Lord’s question, “**Who do you say I am?**” To that question, Peter answered: “**You are the Christ, the Son of the living God**” (Matt. 16:16). Sadly, Peter’s triumphancy was not to last, as we shall see in this section.

The result of Peter’s confession of Christ was that Jesus felt that His disciples were ready to receive some difficult teaching: “**From that time on Jesus began to explain to His disciples that He must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things at the hands of the elders, chief priests and teachers of the law, and that He must be killed and on the third day be raised to life**” (vs. 21). The phrase “**From that time on...**” im-

plies that Jesus changed His teachings, now that the disciples realized that He was the Messiah. This change in teaching was necessary, because the disciples's concept of what the Messiah would do was very different from the path Jesus was to take. "Like most of the Jews, they could form no idea of a suffering Messiah" [Ryle, 199]. "The time of the struggle was at hand and Jesus knew that they were quite unequal to it unless they were armed with a new fortitude. But what was specially necessary was for Christ to show them that His Kingdom would be ushered in, not in great pomp, not with great riches, not with the joyful applause of the world, but by a shameful death" [Calvin, 191]. "All this must have fallen sadly on the ears of men who still indulged visions of a kingdom of a very different sort" [Spurgeon, 227].

Not that this teaching of Jesus' was all somber. In fact, it ended on a triumphant note: **"...and on the third day [Jesus was to be] raised to life."** But for the disciples, the triumph was lost in the suffering.

It was not that the disciples had not had hints of this in Jesus' previous teaching. Jesus had alluded to His death and resurrection earlier: **"Then the Jews demanded of Him, 'What miraculous sign can you show us to prove your authority to do all this?' Jesus answered them, 'Destroy this temple, and I will raise it again in three days.' The Jews replied, 'It has taken forty-six years to build this temple, and you are going to raise it in three days?' But the temple He had spoken of was His body"** (John 2:18-21); Jesus said, **"But I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all men to myself.' He said this to show the kind of death He was going to die"** (John 12:32-33); **"Jesus answered, 'A wicked and adulterous generation asks for a miraculous sign! But none will be given it except the sign of the prophet Jonah. 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. 12:39-40).

Note this about this teaching of Jesus, the suffering, death and resurrection of Jesus did not come as a surprise to Him. Jesus knew His mission, and He knew all of the details of it. It was planned through the counsel of the Father from eternity.

Peter would not accept this teaching of His Lord: **"Peter took Him aside and began to rebuke Him. 'Never, Lord!' he said. 'This shall never happen to you!'"** (vs. 22). Peter's exclamation is self-ironic. He said, **"Never, Lord!"**, but how can one say **"Never"** to one's **"Lord"**. Far from subjecting himself to the will of his Lord, Peter dared to rebuke his Lord. And this rebuke of Jesus by Peter was based solely on Peter's will for God. "Thoughtless enthusiasm moves men and even drives them, so that they do not hesitate to subject God Himself to their will" [Calvin, 192].

Clearly, part of the impetus for Peter to previously declare Jesus as Messiah was his expectation that Jesus would do something like exert His power to overthrow the political authorities, and declare Himself king. “For Peter, it is unthinkable that the one he has just pronounced **‘the Messiah, the Son of the living God’** should be rejected and killed” [Morris, 429]. “There has always been a tendency, and especially in our day, to decide questions of religious truth and duty from the human rather than the divine point of view” [Broadus, 369]. We must always realize that God’s ways are wiser than ours. “From this [rebuke of Jesus] it also appears how mad men are in their perverse zeal. For when Peter tried to interrupt the Master’s course, it was no thanks to him that he did not deprive himself and the whole of mankind of eternal salvation” [Calvin, 193].

For his protestation, Peter received from Jesus much more than a mild rebuke: **“Jesus turned and said to Peter, ‘Get behind me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to me; you do not have in mind the things of God, but the things of men’”** (vs. 23). This was the sharpest rebuke that Jesus ever gave any of His followers, and Peter must surely have been astounded to be addressed as **“Satan”**. But, unbeknownst to Peter, he was being used by Satan. “It is the subtlety of Satan to send temptations to us by the unsuspected hands of our best and dearest friends... Those who have their spiritual senses exercised, will be aware of the voice of Satan, even in a friend, a disciple, a minister, that dissuades them from their duty” [Henry]. Satan, through Peter, was trying to persuade Jesus to give up His mission to die for all mankind. Jesus “felt in it a Satanic lure, a whisper from hell, to move Him from His purpose to suffer” [JFB, 89].

As stated, at the root of Peter’s protestation was his expectation that Jesus, as Messiah, had come at that time to set up a political kingdom on earth. With that expectation, Peter had also anticipated, as the chief of his disciples, ruling with Jesus, and gaining all the material advantage that would accompany doing so. Jesus, wanting to correct these faulty expectations, went on to describe the nature of true disciples: **“Then Jesus said to His disciples, ‘If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me will find it’”** (vss. 24–25). The prospects were even more dire than Peter suspected: not only was the Messiah to be punished and put to death, but His disciples were expected to be prepared for the same fate. “Christ, having shown His disciples that He must suffer, and that He was ready and willing to suffer, here shows them that they must suffer too, and must be ready and willing... What it is to be a disciple of Christ is to come after Him. When Christ called His disciples, this was the word of command, **‘Follow me’**” [Henry]. Such discipleship necessarily entails **“denying oneself”**,

giving up all one's worldly expectations for the sake of doing what our Lord would have us do.

Jesus went on to explain that such self-denial is what true life consists of: **“What good will it be for a man if he gains the whole world, yet forfeits his soul? Or what can a man give in exchange for his soul?”** (vs. 26). True life is more than this world. We have a soul, and the soul lives on. The whole world is not worth as much as even the most decrepit man's soul. “Thus, in language the weightiest, because the simplest, does our Lord shut up His hearers, and all who shall read these words to the end of the world, to the priceless value to every man of his own soul” [JFB, 90]. And yet, sadly, so many a man **“forfeits his soul”** for much, much less than **“the whole world”**—for a very small portion of it, indeed.

“In order that the former teaching might penetrate their minds the better, Christ sets the future judgment before their eyes. For if this transitory life is to become paltry to us, we must be deeply touched by a sense of the heavenly life. But to look up to heaven, our slow and sluggish minds need help” [Calvin, 195]: **“For the Son of Man is going to come in His Father's glory with His angels, and then He will reward each person according to what He has done”** (vs. 27).

Finally, Jesus informed His disciples that they would soon have clear proof of the existence of realms beyond this world, and proof of Jesus' Lordship over those heavenly realms: **“I tell you the truth, some who are standing here will not taste death before they see the Son of Man coming in His kingdom”** (vs. 28). Many have trouble with this verse, because they think (improperly) that Jesus is speaking of His second coming. But clearly, He wasn't speaking of His second coming, for all of His disciples have already **“tasted death”**. Alfred Plummer lists seven events that Jesus may have been speaking of, six of which occurred in the disciples' lifetime: (1) the transfiguration; (2) the resurrection and ascension; (3) Pentecost; (4) the spread of Christianity; (5) the internal development of the gospel; (6) the destruction of Jerusalem; (7) the second coming of Jesus. I myself have not a definite opinion about specifically which of these Jesus was referring, but clearly Jesus' kingdom was manifest in many ways during the lifetime of the disciples, thus fulfilling this verse. “It seems best to take 16:28 as having a more general reference—viz., not referring simply to the Resurrection, to Pentecost, or the like, but to the manifestation of Christ's kingly reign exhibited after the Resurrection in a host of ways, not the least of them being the rapid multiplication of disciples and the mission to the Gentiles. Some of those standing there would live to see Jesus' Gospel proclaimed throughout the Roman Empire and a rich 'harvest' (see 9:37–38) of converts reaped for Jesus Messiah” [Carson, 382].



A Topical Study: Self-Examination

The Necessity of Self-Examination, pt. 5 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 3 (cont. from the June/July 2003 issue)

What method we ought to take, in order to find out whether we do not live in some way of sin.

That you may the more successfully use those means to know whether you do not live in some way of sin; be advised,

1. Evermore to join self-reflection with reading and hearing the word of God. When you read or hear, reflect on yourselves as you go along, comparing yourselves and your own ways with what you read or hear. Reflect and consider what agreement or disagreement there is between the word and your ways. The Scriptures testify against all manner of sin, and contain directions for every duty; as the apostle saith, "**And is profitable for doctrine for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness.**" (2 Tim. 3:16.) Therefore when you there read the rules given us by Christ and his apostles, reflect and consider, each one of you with himself, Do I live according to this rule? Or do I live in any respect contrary to it?

When you read in the historical parts of Scripture an account of the sins of which others have been guilty, reflect on yourselves as you go along, and inquire whether you do not in some degree live in the same or like practices. When you there read accounts how God reprov'd the sins of others, and executed judgments upon them for their sins, examine whether you be not guilty of things of the same nature. When you read the examples of Christ, and of the saints recorded in Scripture, inquire whether you do not live in ways contrary to those examples. When you read there how God commended and rewarded any persons for their virtues and good deeds, inquire whether you perform those duties for which they were commended and rewarded, or whether you do not live in the contrary sins or vices. Let me further direct you, particularly to read the

Scriptures to these ends, that you may compare and examine yourselves in the manner now mentioned.

So if you would know whether you do not live in some way of sin, whenever you hear any sin testified against, or any duty urged, in the preaching of the word, be careful to look back upon yourselves, to compare yourselves and your own ways with what you hear, and strictly examine yourselves, whether you live in this or the other sinful way which you hear testified against; and whether you do this duty which you hear urged. Make use of the word as a glass, wherein you may behold yourselves.

How few are there who do this as they ought to do! who, while the minister is testifying against sin, are busy with themselves in examining their own hearts and ways! The generality rather think of others, how this or that person lives in a manner contrary to what is preached; so that there may be hundreds of things delivered in the preaching of the word, which properly belong to them, and are well suited to their eases; yet it never so much as comes into their minds, that what is delivered any way concerns them. Their minds readily fix upon others, and they can charge them, but never think whether or no they themselves be the persons.

2. If you live in any ways which are generally condemned by the better, and more sober, sort of men, be especially careful to inquire concerning these, whether they be not ways of sin. Perhaps you have argued with yourselves, that such or such a practice is lawful; you cannot see any evil in it. However, if it be generally condemned by godly ministers, and the better and more pious sort of people, it certainly looks suspicious, whether or no there be not some evil in it; so that you may well be put upon inquiring with the utmost strictness, whether it be not sinful. The practice being so generally disapproved of by those who in such cases are most likely to be in the right, may reasonably put you upon more than ordinarily nice and diligent inquiry concerning the lawfulness or unlawfulness of it.

3. Examine yourselves, whether all the ways in which you live, are likely to be pleasant to think of upon a death bed. Persons often in health allow and plead for those things which they would not dare to do if they looked upon themselves as shortly about to go out of the world. They in a great measure still their consciences as to ways in which they walk, and keep them pretty easy, while death is thought of as at a distance: yet the same reflections would be very uncomfortable if they were going out of the world. Conscience is not so easily blinded and muffled then as at other times.

Consider therefore, and inquire diligently, whether or no you do not live in some practice or other, as to the lawfulness of which, when it shall come into your minds upon your deathbed, you will choose to have some further satisfaction, and some better argument than you now have to prove that it is not sinful in order to your being easy about it. Think over your particular ways, and try yourselves with the awful expectation of soon going out of the world into eternity, and earnestly endeavour impartially

to judge what ways you will on a death-bed approve of and rejoice in, and what you will disapprove of, and wish you had let alone.

4. Be advised to consider what others say of you, and improve it to this end, to know whether you do not live in some way of sin. Although men are blind to their own faults, yet they easily discover the faults of others, and are apt enough to speak of them. Sometimes persons live in ways which do not at all become them, yet are blind to it themselves, not seeing the deformity of their own ways while it is most plain and evident to others. They themselves cannot see it, yet others cannot shut their eyes against it, cannot avoid seeing it.

For instance, some persons are of a very proud behaviour, and are not sensible of it, but it appears notorious to others. Some are of a very worldly spirit, they are set after the world, so as to be noted for it, so as to have a name for it; yet they seem not to be sensible of it themselves. Some are of a very malicious and envious spirit; and others see it, and to them it appears very hateful; yet they themselves do not reflect upon it. Therefore since there is no trusting to our own hearts and our own eyes in such cases, we should make our improvement of what others say of us, observe what they charge us with, and what fault they find with us, and strictly examine whether there be not foundation for it.

If others charge us with being proud, or worldly, close, and niggardly; or spiteful and malicious; or with any other ill temper or practice, we should improve it in self-reflection, to inquire whether it be not so. And though the imputation may seem to us to be very groundless, and we think that they, in charging us so and so, are influenced by no good spirit; yet if we act prudently, we shall take so much notice of it as to make it an occasion of examining ourselves.

Thus we should improve what our friends say to us and of us, when they from friendship tell us of anything which they observe amiss in us. It is most imprudent, as well as most unchristian, to take it amiss, and resent it, when we are thus told of our faults: we should rather rejoice in it, that we are shown our spots. Thus also we should improve what our enemies say of us if they from an ill spirit reproach and revile to our faces, we should consider it, so far as to reflect inward upon ourselves, and inquire whether it be not so, as they charge us. For though what is said, be said in a reproachful, reviling manner, yet there may be too much truth in it. When men revile others even from an ill spirit towards them, yet they are likely to fix upon real faults, they are likely to fall upon us where we are weakest and most defective, and where we have given them most occasion. An enemy will soonest attack us where we can least defend ourselves: and a man that reviles us, though he do it from an unchristian spirit, and in an unchristian manner, yet will be most likely to speak of that, for which we are really most to blame, and are most blamed by others.

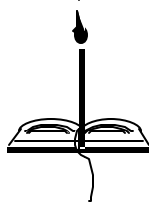
So when we hear of others talking against us behind our backs, though they do very ill in so doing, yet the right improvement of it will be,

to reflect upon ourselves, and consider whether we indeed have not those faults which they lay to our charge. This will be a more Christian and a more wise improvement of it, than to be in a rage, to revile again, and to entertain an ill will towards them for their evil-speaking. This is the most wise and prudent improvement of such things. Hereby we may get good out of evil, and this is the surest way to defeat the designs of our enemies in reviling and back-biting us. They do it from ill will, and to do us on injury; but in this way we may turn it to our own good.

5. Be advised, when you see others faults, to examine whether there be not the same in yourselves. This is not done by many, as is evident from this: that they are so ready to speak of others' faults, and aggravate them, when they have the very same themselves. Thus, nothing is more common than for proud men to accuse others of pride, and to declaim against them upon that account. So it is common for dishonest men to complain of being wronged by others. When a person seeth ill dispositions and practices in others, he is not under the same disadvantage in seeing their odiousness and deformity, as when he looks upon any ill disposition or practice in himself. He can see how odious these and those things are in others; he can easily see what a hateful thing pride is in another; and so of malice, and other evil dispositions or practices. In others he can easily see their deformity; for he doth not look through such a deceitful glass, as when he sees the same things in himself.

Therefore, when you see others faults; when you take notice, how such an one acts amiss, what an ill spirit he shows, and how unsuitable his behaviour is; when you hear others speak of it, and when you yourselves find fault with others in their dealings with you, or in things wherein you are any way concerned with them; then reflect, and consider, whether there be nothing of the same nature in yourselves. Consider that these things are just as deformed and hateful in you as they are in others. Pride, a haughty spirit and carriage, are as odious in you, as they are in your neighbour. Your malicious and revengeful spirit towards your neighbour, is just as hateful as a malicious and revengeful spirit in him towards you. It is as unreasonable for you to wrong, and to be dishonest with your neighbour, as it is for him to wrong, and be dishonest with you. It is as injurious and unchristian for you to talk against others behind their backs, as it is for others to do the same with respect to you.

6. Consider the ways in which others are blinded as to sins in which they live, and strictly inquire whether you be not blinded in the same ways. You are sensible that others are blinded by their lusts; consider whether the prevalence of some carnal appetite or lust of the mind have not blinded you. You see how others are blinded by their temporal interest, inquire whether your temporal interests do not blind you also in some things, so as to make you allow yourselves in things, which are not right. You are as liable to be blinded through inclination and interest, and have the same deceitful and wicked hearts as other men, **“As in water face answereth to face, so the heart of man to man.”** (Prov. 27:12.)



A Study in Psalms: Psalm 63

Psalm 63 – From the Desert

A psalm of David.

When he was in the Desert of Judah.

- ¹O God, You are my God,
earnestly I seek You;
My soul thirsts for You,
my body longs for You,
In a dry and weary land
where there is no water.
- ²I have seen You in the sanctuary
and beheld Your power and Your glory.
- ³Because Your love is better than life,
my lips will glorify You.
- ⁴I will praise You as long as I live,
and in Your name I will lift up my hands.
- ⁵My soul will be satisfied as with the richest of foods;
with singing lips my mouth will praise You.
- ⁶On my bed I remember You;
I think of You
through the watches of the night.
- ⁷Because You are my help,
I sing in the shadow of Your wings.
- ⁸My soul clings to You;
Your right hand upholds me.
- ⁹They who seek my life will be destroyed;
they will go down to the depths of the earth.
- ¹⁰They will be given over to the sword
and become food for jackals.
- ¹¹But the king will rejoice in God;
all who swear by God's name will praise Him,
while the mouths of liars will be silenced.

As the inscription notes, this psalm was written when David was “**in the Desert of Judah.**” “David did not leave off singing because he was in

the wilderness, neither did he in slovenly idleness go on repeating Psalms intended for other occasions; but he carefully made his worship suitable to his circumstances, and presented to his God a wilderness hymn when he was in the wilderness" [Spurgeon]. We as children of God are not guaranteed easy lives, and so we too, just as the godly men of the past, may find ourselves (figuratively speaking) in the desert. David here sets a fine example on how to praise God in the desert. For David realized that, no matter how far he was from civilization, from his friends, from the physical trappings of worship, God was with him. "As the sweetest of Paul's epistles were those that bore date out of a prison, so some of the sweetest of David's psalms were those that were penned, as this was, in a wilderness" [Henry]. "Troubles are grievous when they are present, but may prove a matter of a joyful song, when called to remembrance" [Dickson]

The psalm begins: "**O God, You are my God, earnestly I seek You**" (vs. 1). Being far from the tabernacle in Jerusalem did not prevent David from seeking God. Nor did finding himself in the wilderness prevent David from appropriating God as *his* God. "We should always approach God, not only as God, glorious and almighty, but as our God. The phrase '**O God, You are my God**' includes the two ideas of omnipotence and covenant relation, q.d., O God, Thou art mighty, almighty, the Governor of the world, and Thou hast promised to be my friend and helper" [Plumer]. David, having cultivated a close relationship with God before he was thrust into the wilderness, was well-prepared for facing the trials of the wilderness. To call God "**my God**" is "a thing which is not so easily said as the world imagines it and thinks it to be. Indeed, it is easy to the mouth, but it is not easy to the heart. The relations of God to His people are not bare and empty titles, but they carry some activity with them, both from Him towards them, and from them also answerably towards Him. Those whom God is a God to, He bestows special favors upon them; and those to whom God is a God, they return special services to Him" [Horton, in Spurgeon].

The special relationship David had with God is reflected in the language through which he expresses his yearning for God: "**My soul thirsts for You, my body longs for You, in a dry and weary land where there is no water**" (vs. 1). Thirst, after the need to breathe, is the second strongest bodily desire. "Thirst is an insatiable longing after that which is one of the most essential supports of life; there is no reasoning with it, no forgetting it, no despising it, no overcoming it by stoical indifference" [Spurgeon]. David was familiar with thirst, being in "**a dry and weary land where there is no water**", and so it was no whimsical thing for him to say to God, "**My soul thirsts for You.**" Note also, David yearned for God with his entire being, with both "**soul**" and "**body**".

David recalls his encounters with God under more favorable circumstances: "**I have seen You in the sanctuary and beheld Your power**

and Your glory" (vs. 2). "He remembers and mentions the two attributes which had most impressed themselves upon his mind when he had been rapt in adoration in the holy place" [Spurgeon]. Though, while in the desert, David was far from the holy place, this did not stop him from praising His God: "**Because Your love is better than life, my lips will glorify You. I will praise You as long as I live, and in Your name I will lift up my hands**" (vss. 3-4).

And if David could praise God while on the run in the desert, he could certainly praise God anytime, any place. As he says: "**I will praise You as long as I live, and in Your name I will lift up my hands**" (vs. 4). Praising God, in all circumstances, has benefits to our emotional well-being, bringing us satisfaction and contentment, as we get our minds off our worldly problems, and focus on God's eternal plan: "**My soul will be satisfied as with the richest of foods; with singing lips my mouth will praise You**" (vs. 5).

David's communion with and meditation upon God was never-ending: "**On my bed I remember You; I think of You through the watches of the night**" (vs. 6). "Such is the nature of true religion and the power of divine grace, that it gets good out of all evil, and turns even a sleepless night to some valuable account. Blessed is the man, who has learned the art of not wasting precious hours in the nightwatches, although he may be denied the repose, which his weary nature demands" [Plumer].

David's praise for God was based on his first-hand experiences of God's goodness: "**Because You are my help, I sing in the shadow of Your wings**" (vs. 7). "Meditation had refreshed his memory and recalled to him his past deliverances. It were well if we oftener read our own diaries, especially noting the hand of the Lord in helping us in suffering, want labor, or dilemma. This is the grand use of memory, to furnish us with proofs of the Lord's faithfulness, and lead us onward to a growing confidence in Him" [Spurgeon]. Selfish as we are, "there is more encouragement in the least blessing bestowed upon ourselves than in the greatest blessing bestowed upon a stranger; and, therefore, on every account we may safely say, that a whole library of biographical books, and those relating exclusively to righteous individuals, could not so minister to the assurance of a believer as the documents which his own memory can furnish" [Spurgeon].

David sings in "**the shadow**" of God's wings: "The very shade of God is sweet to a believer" [Spurgeon]. "It is our duty to rejoice in the shadow of God's wings, which denotes our recourse to Him by faith and prayer, as naturally as the chickens, when they are cold or frightened, run by instinct under the wings of the hen. It intimates also our reliance upon Him as able and ready to help us and our refreshment and satisfaction in His care and protection" [Henry].

Some fault God's children for using God as a crutch. True believers

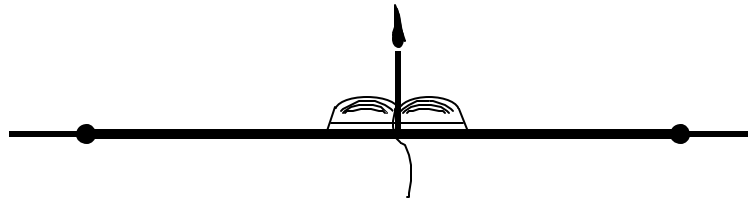
are proud to use God as a crutch, and depend on Him for everything: **“My soul clings to You, Your right hand upholds me”** (vs. 8). “A believer in God cannot endure a thought of separation from God, nor forbear to seek after God, when he misseth His presence, but will use all means to recover the sense of His presence which he hath felt before” [Dickson].

David momentarily returns to his own worldly problems, with the faith that God will right everything: **“They who seek my life will be destroyed; they will go down to the depths of the earth. They will be given over to the sword and become food for jackals”** (vss. 9–10).

But he quickly returns to thoughts of praising God: **“But the king will rejoice in God; all who swear by God’s name will praise Him, while the mouths of liars will be silenced”** (vs. 11). “See the difference between the mouth that praises God, and the mouth that forges lies: the first shall never be stopped, but shall sing on forever; the second shall be made speechless at the bar of God” [Spurgeon].

David’s worldly standing did not get in the way of his praise for God. Though a king, David praised the One greater than he. “The greatest men are best employed in gladly adoring and serving God. The king can do nothing beyond that in dignity and nobleness. But the enjoyments of religion, even the highest of them are not reserved for crowned heads. They are also for every true worshipper. So that the poor pious peasant, artisan, exile, beggar or prisoner shall at last glory as much as any other” [Plumer].

What a blessing to have a caring, omnipresent God, who is ready and willing to hear our prayers, wherever we may be. “At home, abroad, surrounded by friends, menaced by foes, in his own abode, in exile, he has peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ” [Plumer].



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Our Affliction Temporary

"Whatever afflictions may befall us here, they will not last long, but will soon be swallowed up in the greater joys or sorrows of the eternal world. These tears will not always flow; these sighs will not always heave our breasts. We can sigh no longer than the vital breath inspires our lungs; and we can weep no longer than till death stops all the fountains of our tears; and that will be in a very little time. And when we enter into the eternal world, if we have been the dutiful children of God here, His own gentle hand shall wipe away every tear from our faces, and He will comfort the mourners. Then all the sorrows of life will cease forever, and no more painful remembrance of them will remain than of the pains and sickness of our unconscious infancy."

-- Samuel Davies (1724-1761)

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