

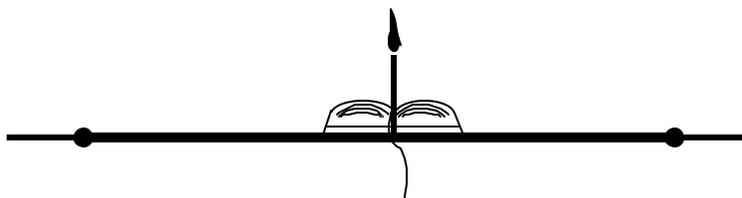
# Scripture Studies

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

Old Testament Study: Exodus 7:1-5 .....	3
<i>A Hardened Heart</i>	
A Classic Study: Patience in Affliction, pt. 24, by Richard Baxter .....	8
<i>The Divisions of Christians</i>	
New Testament Study: Matthew 17:10-23 .....	12
<i>A Question Concerning Elijah; Faith</i>	
A Topical Study: Self-Examination, pt. 11 .....	16
<i>The Necessity of Self-Examination, pt. 7, by Jonathan Edwards</i>	
A Study in Psalms: Psalms 67 .....	20
<i>“May the People Praise You, O God”</i>	



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May God bless you as you study His Word.



## Old Testament Study: Exodus 7:1-5

[At this point, we will continue our examination of Exodus by re-printing Arthur W. Pink's studies of these passages.]—*Ed.*

### **A Hardened Heart, by Arthur W. Pink (1886-1952)**

<sup>1</sup>And the LORD said unto Moses, "See, I have made thee a god to Pharaoh: and Aaron thy brother shall be thy prophet. <sup>2</sup>Thou shalt speak all that I command thee: and Aaron thy brother shall speak unto Pharaoh, that he send the children of Israel out of his land. <sup>3</sup>And I will harden Pharaoh's heart, and multiply my signs and my wonders in the land of Egypt. <sup>4</sup>But Pharaoh shall not hearken unto you, that I may lay my hand upon Egypt, and bring forth mine armies, [and] my people the children of Israel, out of the land of Egypt by great judgments. <sup>5</sup>And the Egyptians shall know that I [am] the LORD, when I stretch forth mine hand upon Egypt, and bring out the children of Israel from among them." (Exodus 7:1-5, AV)

The seventh chapter begins the second literary division of the book of Exodus. The first six chapters are concerned more particularly with the *person of the deliverer*; the next six with an account of the *work of redemption*. In the first section we have had a brief description of the deadly persecution of Israel, then an account of Moses' birth and his miraculous preservation by God, then his identifying of himself with his people and his flight into Midian. Next, we have learned how God met him, commanded him to go down into Egypt, overcame his fears, and equipped him for his mission. Finally, we have noted how that he delivered Jehovah's message to the Hebrews and then to Pharaoh, and how that the king refused to heed the Divine demand, and how in consequence the people were thoroughly discouraged by the increased burdens laid upon them. Moses himself was deeply dejected, and chapter 6 closes with the Lord's servant bemoaning the seeming hopelessness of his task. Thus the *weakness* of the instrument was fully manifested that it might the better be seen that the *power* was of Jehovah alone, and of Jehovah acting not in response to faith but in cove-

nant faithfulness and in sovereign grace.

From chapter 7 onwards there is a marked change: Moses is no more timid, hesitant and discouraged. The omnipotence of the Lord is displayed in every scene. The conflict from this point onwards was one not of words but of deeds. The gauntlet had been thrown down, and now it is open war between the Almighty and the Egyptians. It hardly needs to be pointed out that what is before us in these early chapters of Exodus is something more than a mere episode in ancient history, something more than what was simply of local interest. A thrilling drama is unfolded to our view, and though its movements are swift, yet is there sufficient detail and repetition in principle for us to discern clearly its great design. It spreads before us, in vivid tableau, *the great conflict between good and evil* as far as this comes within the range of human vision.

So far as Scripture informs us the Great Conflict is being fought out *in this world*, hence this historical drama, with its profound symbolic moral meaning, was staged in the land of *Egypt*. The great *mystery* in connection with the Conflict is forcibly shown us in the prosperity of the wicked and the adversity of the righteous. The Egyptians held the whip hand: the Hebrews groaned under unbearable oppression. The leading characters in the tableau are Moses as the vice-regent of *God*, and Pharaoh as the representative and emissary of *Satan*. The powerful and haughty king takes fiendish delight in persecuting the Lord's people, and openly defies the Almighty Himself. To outward sight, *the issue* seemed long in doubt. The kingdom of Pharaoh was shaken again and again — as has the kingdom of Satan been during the course of the ages, in such events as the Flood, the destruction of the Canaanites the Advent of the Son of God, the day of Pentecost, the Reformation, etc., etc. — but each fresh interposition of Jehovah's power and the withdrawal of His judgments only issued in the hardening of Pharaoh's heart. The *prolongation* of the Egyptian contest gave full opportunity for the complete testing of human responsibility, the trying of the saints' faith, and the manifestation of all the perfections and attributes of Deity — apparently the three chief ends which the Creator has in view in suffering the entrance and *continuance* of evil in His domains. The great drama *closes* by showing the absolute triumph of Jehovah, the completed redemption of His people, and the utter overthrow of His and their enemies. Thus we have revealed to the eye of faith the Glorious Consummation when God's elect — through the work of the Mediator — shall be emancipated from all bondage, when every high thing that exalteth itself against the Almighty shall be cast down, and when God Himself shall be *all in all*. We shall now follow step by step the various stages by which this end was reached.

**“And the Lord said unto Moses, See, I have made thee a god to Pharaoh: and Aaron thy brother shall be thy prophet”** (7:1). This presents a startling contrast from what was before us at the close of Exodus 6. There we read of Moses' complaint before the Lord, **“I am of uncircum-**

**cised lips, and how shall Pharaoh hearken unto me?”** (Ex. 6:30). That was a confession of feebleness, but it sprang from unbelief. Here we find Jehovah acting according to His sovereign power and dealing in wondrous grace with His poor servant.

**“I have made thee a god to Pharaoh”**, that is, Jehovah had selected Moses to act as His ambassador, had invested him with Divine authority, and was about to use him to perform prodigies which were contrary to the ordinary course of nature. But mark the qualification, **“I have made thee a god to Pharaoh”**. Acting in God’s stead, Moses was to *rule over* Egypt’s proud king, commanding him what he should do, controlling him when he did wrong, and punishing him for his disobedience, so that Pharaoh had to apply *to him* for the removal of the plagues.

**“And Aaron thy brother shall be thy prophet”**. If this be compared with Ex. 4:15-16 we shall find a Divine definition of what constitutes a prophet. There we find the Lord promising Moses concerning Aaron that **“thou shalt speak unto him, and put words in his mouth: and I will be with thy mouth, and with his mouth, and will teach you what ye shall do. And he shall be thy spokesman unto the people: and he shall be, even he shall be to thee instead of a mouth, and thou shalt be to him instead of God.”** God’s prophet then is God’s spokesman: he acts as God’s mouthpiece, the Lord putting into his lips the very *words* he would utter. Thus Moses was a **“god to Pharaoh”** in this additional way, in that he had one who acted as *his* prophet.

**“Thou shalt speak all that I command thee: and Aaron thy brother shall speak unto Pharaoh, that he send the children of Israel out of his land”** (v. 2). This injunction was very definite. Moses was not free to make a selection from Jehovah’s words and communicate to Aaron those which *he* deemed most advisable to say unto Pharaoh, but he was to speak *all* that had been commanded him. A similar charge is laid upon God’s servant today: he is to **“preach the Word”** (2 Timothy 4:3) and to **“hold fast the form of sound words”** (2 Timothy 1:13), and is warned that **“If any man teach otherwise, and consent not to wholesome words, even the words of our Lord Jesus Christ, and to the doctrine which is according to godliness; he is a fool, knowing nothing”** (1 Timothy 6:3, 4). But alas! how few, how very few there are, who faithfully shun not to declare **“the whole counsel of God”**.

**“And I will harden Pharaoh’s heart, and multiply My signs and My wonders in the land of Egypt”** (v. 3). This verse brings before us one of the most solemn truths revealed in the Holy Scriptures — the Divine hardening of human hearts. At no point, perhaps, has the slowness of man to believe *all* that the prophets have spoken been more lamentably manifested than here. The hardening of Pharaoh’s heart by God has been eagerly seized by His enemies to make an attack upon the citadel of truth. Infidels have argued that if Pharaoh’s subsequent crimes were the result of

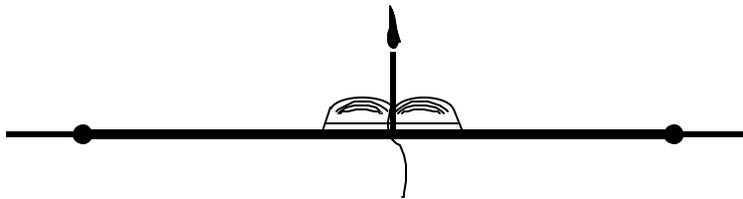
his heart being hardened by Jehovah, then that makes God the author of his sins; and, furthermore, God must be very unrighteous in punishing him for them. The sad thing is that so many of the professed servants of God have, instead of faithfully maintaining the integrity of God's Word, attempted to blunt its keen edge in order to make it more acceptable to the carnal mind. Instead of acknowledging with fear and trembling that God's Word *does* teach that the Lord actually hardened the heart of Pharaoh, most of the commentators have really argued that He did nothing of the kind, that He simply *permitted* the Egyptian monarch to harden his own heart.

That Pharaoh *did* harden his own heart the Scriptures expressly affirm, but they *also* declare that the LORD hardened his heart too, and clearly this is not one and the same thing, or the two *different* expressions would not have been employed. Our duty is to believe *both* statements, but to attempt to show the philosophy of their reconciliation is probably, as another has said, "to attempt to fathom infinity". In Psalm 105:25 it is said, "**He turned their hearts to hate His people, to deal subtly with His servants**". Nothing could be stronger or plainer than this. Are we to deny it because *we* cannot explain the way in which God did it? On the same ground we might reject the doctrine of the Trinity. I may be asked how God could in any sense harden a man's heart without Him being the Author of sin. But the most assured belief of the fact does not require that an answer should be given by me to this question. If *God* has not explained the matter (and He has not), then it is not for us to feign to be wise above what is written. I believe many things recorded in Scripture not because I can *explain* their rationale, but because I know that God cannot lie. Calvin was right when he represented those as *perverting* the Scriptures who insist that no more is meant than a bare *permission* when God is said to harden the hearts of men. Is it nothing more than passive permission on His part when God *softens* men's hearts? Is it not, rather, by His active agency? Let us remember that it is no part of our business to vindicate God in justifying the grounds of His procedure; our responsibility is to believe *all* that He has revealed in His Word, on the sole ground of His written testimony. Our business is to "**preach the Word**" in its purity, not to tone it down or explain away its most objectionable portions in order to render it acceptable to the depraved reason of worms of the dust. The Lord will vindicate Himself in due time, silencing all His critics, and glorifying Himself before His saints.

It should be pointed out that the case of Pharaoh and the Egyptians does not by any means stand alone in the Holy Scriptures. In Deuteronomy 2:30 Moses records the fact that "**Sihon king of Heshbon would not let us pass by him: for the Lord thy God hardened his spirit, and made his heart obstinate, that He might deliver him into thy hand**". The reference is to Numbers 21:21-23 where we read, "**And Israel sent messengers unto Sihon king of the Amorites, saying, Let me pass**

**through thy land: we will not turn into the fields, or into the vineyards; we will not drink of the waters of the ground: but we will go along by the king's highway, until we be passed thy borders. And Sihon would not suffer Israel to pass through his borders".** The verse in Deuteronomy explains to us the reason of Sihon's obstinacy. Clearly it was no mere *judicial* hardening, instead it was a solemn illustration of what we read of in Romans 9:18, "**whom He will He hardens**". So, too, in Joshua 11:19, 20 we are told "**There was not a city that made peace with the children of Israel, save the Hivites the inhabitants of Gibeon: all other they took in battle. For it was of the Lord to harden their hearts, that they should come against Israel in battle, that He might destroy them utterly**". Such solemn passages as these are not to be reasoned about, but must be accepted in childlike faith, knowing that the Judge of all the earth does nothing but what is *right*.

**"But Pharaoh shall not hearken unto you, that I may lay My hand upon Egypt, and bring forth Mine armies, and My people the children of Israel, out of the land of Egypt by great judgments, and the Egyptians shall know that I am the Lord, when I stretch forth Mine hand upon Egypt, and bring out the children of Israel from among them"** (vv. 4,5). These verses supply us with one reason *why* the Lord hardened the hearts of Pharaoh and the Egyptians: it was in order that He might have full opportunity to display His mighty power. A dark background it was indeed, but a dark background is required to bring out the white light of Divine holiness. Similarly we find the Lord Jesus saying, "**It must needs be that offenses come, but woe to that man by whom the offense cometh**" (Matthew 18:7). What Jehovah's "**great judgments**" were we shall see in the chapters that follow.



# A Classic Study: Patience in Affliction



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

[In each article, Mr. Baxter gives advice on how to be patient through a specific type of affliction.]—*Ed.*

### The Divisions of Christians

***The sad distempers and divisions of Christians, and the hurt they do to the World, and to one another, and the dishonorable state of the Church***

Another exercise of our patience is, the great imperfection, scandals, and divisions of Christians, and the hurt they do to one another, and to the world, and the dishonorable broken state that they are in.

It is a doleful case to think, how narrow, and low, and corrupt a state the Church was in for four thousand years before Christ's incarnation: how small it was for the two first centuries; how quickly shameful heresies did corrupt it; how lamentably they multiplied even under persecution; how quickly the advanced, enriched clergy were corrupted; what odious schisms they made in the Church; how they grieved the hearts of peaceable princes, who with all their power were unable to keep even common love and peace among the prelates, and to get them to live but as quietly with each other as the heathen did. What a shame is it to think, how the majority carried it in their most famous councils; and into how many sects the church was broken, and that so many hundred years' experience does not end or heal their rents. To read the doleful divisions and cruelties by various sects, and the bloody feuds. What clamors! What preaching! What writings! What railings! What diabolical slanders and persecutions of one another! To see how ignorant the most zealous Christians are in many places, and, alas! even the teachers of them; and how contentious and prone to sects and bitter censures, and to justify unjustifiable things, and to make odious one another, and to speak evil of the things they understand not, and to be most confident unto rage, where they are most mistaken! To hear how confidently contrary sides appeal to God, and father all their

cause on Him! How confidently and religiously they seem to die, who are executed for contrary causes! To read every week's newsbooks, whose studied work is, with the greatest wit, and vehemency, and gross lies, to draw Christians to hate and destroy each other; and while they cry up love and peace, for the same men so to fight against it, worse than all their public enemies, so that there appeareth no hope of saving the land; yea, the most upright Christians from the lies, rage, and malice of professed Christians. So that men seem incarnate devils.

And, alas!, the few sincere souls live below the holy joy which their Christian faith and hope bespeaketh, in too much fear and grief, or tenderness of the body. How can patience endure to see all this?

The case is doleful; but, 1. Remember that all this doth but tell us what sin is, and what it hath done to mankind, and yet men will hardly believe that it is so bad.

2. All this may help you to believe that there is a hell and devils, that God is not to be accused of it, when sin itself is so much of misery and hell.

3. All this doth most notably set forth the excellency of wisdom, godliness, and justice, when the contraries are so odious. It is not godliness, truth, or justice, but the want of them in whole or part, which is the cause of all this evil. Do but think if all England, or all the world, were but such as those few humble, holy, charitable, peaceable, patient Christians, which you and I know! Oh what a quiet and blessed land and world would it then be! I know the places where they live in so great holiness, love, and peace, that it is a great delight to live among them. Were all such as some of my beloved friends and daily companions are, and have been, it would be such a resemblance of heaven, as would leave no room for the sad complaint of this objection. And by this we see what an excellent thing true faith and godliness is in itself. And though in the same persons there be the remnants of ignorance, error, and sin, which are a trouble to others and themselves, this is because that grace is yet imperfect, but its excellence appeareth in being contrary to sin, and so far subduing it, and keeping it as fire in the chimney, from doing that mischief which reigning sin doth: and making men so good and useful, notwithstanding their remaining faults.

4. And in a life of trial which prepareth us for the reward, it is no wonder if there be somewhat left for all grace to oppose, and exercise itself against. What war, what victory is there where there is no enemy? And what crown?

5. The church is Christ's hospital, and is it a wonder that all are sore and sick? We are here under His cure: He hath done much already, more than all the world could do, in the work of true regeneration and sanctification: He hath broken the head of the serpent, and the heart of sin. And it is dying daily more and more, and it is not the imperfection that must

cause us to undervalue so great a work.

6. Christ knoweth His own grace in all believers, even the weakest, notwithstanding all their faults and follies; and He loveth His own, while He hateth their sin, much more than any man can do: and He pardoneth their remaining infirmities, and loveth their persons, and calleth them His brethren, and so must we. If Christ can pardon sin, and love the uprightness of the imperfect, we must imitate Him.

7. As we must live in constant need of our Creator for our daily bread, or life, or preservation, so must we live in daily need of the pardoning and healing grace of our Redeemer: as once creating puts us not into a state of self-sufficiency and independence, so neither doth once redeeming us. And the daily benefit of a Savior's pardon, and healing grace, is our daily comfort.

8. As I told you before about the imperfection of each one's grace, God will have a difference between earth and heaven, and what we want here, we shall there have in perfection; even greater perfection than we can here believe.

9. The faults of all Christians teach us all to think humbly of ourselves, and also not to overvalue imperfect man, nor to trust the best too far; nor to take all for true or good, which they do or teach; but to walk cautiously with all men, and to put our whole trust in God alone.

10. And the worse we all are, the more we discern the freeness of God's love and grace, and the great cause of thankfulness that we have for all our mercies.

11. And when we see that the best on earth are so imperfect, it should help us all to long for heaven; where there is no ignorance or error, no sin, no malice, no proud censoriousness, no divisions, but God is joyfully praised by all, as with one soul, one mind, one love, one mouth.

12. In all ages and countries where the Church hath been most degenerate, God hath had many that have maintained their integrity, and have not consented to the corruptions and contentions of the times, nor run into the guilty of the ambitious clergy, or of unruly heretics; and a few such as are His jewels, are worth many of the earthly, drossy world.

13. And what wonder is it if nominal Christians that are real hypocrites and wicked men, be haters and persecutors of the just, and the plagues of the world, and the chiefest instruments of the devil on earth. Certainly the false profession of Christianity is so far from making men good, and saving them, that it sublimateth their wickedness, and makes them the worst and most miserable of men.

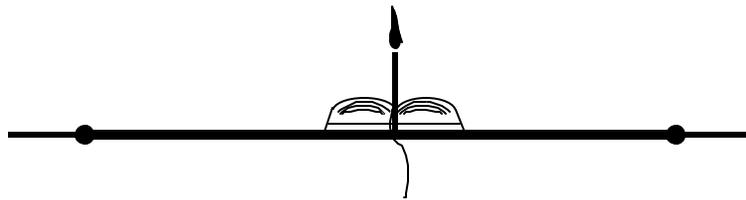
14. It somewhat tendeth to allay the fears of weak Christians who think that their faults are inconsistent with sincerity, when they see that so many of all sorts are so faulty: they see what God's mercy beareth with in all.

15. And it is no real cause of dishonor to charity; for no enemy can

find any fault in that. There is no sin against God or man, which Christ hath not forbidden, and is not more against than the most forbidden, and is not more against than the most righteous alive is; it is therefore utter impudence, to charge those faults of men on Christ, which He forbiddeth and abhorreth. What would they have Him to do more to signify His hatred of sin, than to condemn it, and prepare hell for all that live and die impenitent? And Himself to die, rather than it shall go unpunished, even in those that are forgiven? And to do so much as He hath done to destroy it?

16. And if the wicked will perish by the scandal which they take at Christians' faults, their impudence maketh their damnation just. It were else easy for them to see a difference between the imperfections of a saint, and the wickedness of a beastly or malignant sinner: and they should rather gather, that if the faults of serious believers are odious, their own reigning sin is much more so; and therefore this should hasten their repentance.

17. And oh how desirable should the common sin, and ignorance, and divisions in this world make Christ's appearing and glorious kingdom to us, when the whole Church shall be presented spotless, and beautiful in holiness and love, and Christ will be glorified in His saints, and admired in all believers! The holy city of God, the Jerusalem above, hath nothing but perfect amiableness, concord, love and joy, where all are, though many, yet but one.



# New Testament Study: Matthew 17:10-23



## A Question Concerning Elijah

<sup>10</sup>The disciples asked Him, "Why then do the teachers of the law say that Elijah must come first?"

<sup>11</sup>Jesus replied, "To be sure, Elijah comes and will restore all things. <sup>12</sup>But I tell you, Elijah has already come, and they did not recognize him, but have done to him everything they wished. In the same way the Son of Man is going to suffer at their hands." <sup>13</sup>Then the disciples understood that He was talking to them about John the Baptist.

The three disciples (Peter, John and James), having just come down from the mount of transfiguration, were more convinced than ever that Jesus is Son of the living God, and the promised Messiah. And the sight of Elijah on the mountain probably reminded them of the prophecy that said that the return of Elijah would precede the coming of the Messiah. So, **"The disciples asked [Jesus], 'Why then do the teachers of the law say that Elijah must come first?'"** (vs. 10). The prophecy about Elijah comes from Malachi 4:6: **"See, I will send you the prophet Elijah before that great and dreadful day of the LORD comes."** The teachers of the law foresaw only one coming of the Messiah. The prophecy in Malachi (we now realize) refers to the second coming of Jesus, for it says that Elijah will come **"before that great and dreadful day of the LORD comes."** The phrase **"the great and dreadful day"** refers to the end-times of tribulation and judgment which will occur when our Lord returns.

So, Jesus replied to the disciples: **"To be sure, Elijah comes and will restore all things"** (vs. 11). Note, He says **"will restore all things."** Jesus knew that He was to return in the future, and that Elijah would precede Him then. But then also, there was a man who preceded Jesus in His first coming, who came in the **"spirit and the power of Elijah"** (see Luke 1:17). Jesus told the disciples: **"But I tell you, Elijah has already come, and they did not recognize him, but have done to him everything they wished. In the same way the Son of Man is going to suffer at their hands.' Then the disciples understood that He was talking to them about John the Baptist"** (vs. 13). The children of Israel **"did not**

**recognize**” John as fulfilling the prophecy about Elijah, nor (by and large) did they accept Jesus as their Messiah. Had Jesus been accepted by His people as the Messiah in His first coming, John the Baptist would have fulfilled the prophecy concerning Elijah, for John came in **“the spirit and the power of Elijah”**. But Jesus will come again, and another man will precede Him, and, as Jesus taught, **“will restore all things.”** “There seems no doubt that the prophecy in Malachi, like many other OT passages, has a two-fold interpretation; the secondary and symbolic meaning referred to John at Christ’s first appearing, and then literally before Christ’s second coming. This entire section, suggesting Scripture to be fulfilled in a wider sense than appears on surface, shows how often God’s Word is found to be much deeper and fuller in meaning than its mere words seem to imply; and it is therefore wise to follow disciples’ example and ask Divine guidance in its interpretation” [Griffith Thomas, 259].

### Faith

<sup>14</sup>When they came to the crowd, a man approached Jesus and knelt before Him. <sup>15</sup>“Lord, have mercy on my son,” he said. “He has seizures and is suffering greatly. He often falls into the fire or into the water. <sup>16</sup>I brought him to Your disciples, but they could not heal him.”

<sup>17</sup>“O unbelieving and perverse generation,” Jesus replied, “how long shall I stay with you? How long shall I put up with you? Bring the boy here to me.” <sup>18</sup>Jesus rebuked the demon, and it came out of the boy, and he was healed from that moment.

<sup>19</sup>Then the disciples came to Jesus in private and asked, “Why couldn’t we drive it out?”

<sup>20</sup>He replied, “Because you have so little faith. I tell you the truth, if you have faith as small as a mustard seed, you can say to this mountain, ‘Move from here to there’ and it will move. Nothing will be impossible for you. <sup>21</sup>But this kind does not go out except by prayer and fasting.”

<sup>22</sup>When they came together in Galilee, He said to them, “The Son of Man is going to be betrayed into the hands of men. <sup>23</sup>They will kill Him, and on the third day He will be raised to life.” And the disciples were filled with grief.

In all three Gospels which contain the transfiguration (Matthew, Mark and Luke), this episode closely follows. Therefore, I assume that this episode took place not long after Jesus and His disciples came down

the mountain: **“When they came to the crowd, a man approached Jesus and knelt before Him. ‘Lord, have mercy on my son,’ he said. ‘He has seizures and is suffering greatly. He often falls into the fire or into the water. I brought him to Your disciples, but they could not heal him’”** (vss. 14–16). In these last few chapters of Matthew, lapses of faith by the disciples and other failures are a recurring theme (see 14:16–21; 14:26–27; 14:28–31; 15:16; 15:23; 15:33; 16:5; 16:22). In this case, the disciples (presumably the nine of the Twelve who did not go to the mount of transfiguration) were not able to heal a demon-possessed boy. “This failure in their healing ministry at first seems strange, since Jesus had clearly given them power to heal and exorcise demons (10:1, 8). Yet it is part of the pattern of the disciples’ advance and failure. In other situations they had shown lack of faith (14:26–27, 31; 15:5, 8)—a reminder that their power to do kingdom miracles was not their own but, unlike magic, was entirely derivative and related to their own walk of faith” [Carson, 390].

Jesus was not happy with their failure: **“‘O unbelieving and perverse generation,’ Jesus replied, ‘how long shall I stay with you? How long shall I put up with you?’”** (vs. 17). Nothing grieves our Lord more than people’s unbelief, for this obstructs all the blessings which are appointed to come by faith” [Dickson, 204].

Note the two rhetorical questions, **“How long shall I stay with you? How long shall I put up with you?”** The implication of these questions is that lack of faith drives Jesus away. “The longer that Christ hath offered Himself to a people or person, and the more patience He hath shown towards them, the more He is provoked by their unbelief to reject them, and depart from them” [Dickson, 204].

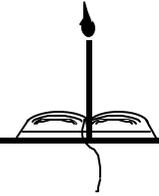
Jesus made up for their lack of faith: **“Bring the boy here to me’ Jesus rebuked the demon, and it came out of the boy, and he was healed from that moment”** (vss. 17–18). “Note, Christ’s glories do not make Him unmindful of us, and of our wants and miseries. Christ, when He came down from the mount, where He had conversation with Moses and Elijah, did not take His estate upon Him, but was as easy of access, as ready to poor beggars, and as familiar with the multitude, as ever He used to be” [Henry].

By way of application, parents whose children have gone astray may take hope from this episode. “Bad as this boy’s case was, of whom we read in these verses, he was **‘cured from the very hour’** that he was brought to Christ! Parents, and teachers, and ministers should go on praying for young men, even at their worst. Hard as their hearts seem now, they may yet be softened: desperate as their wickedness now appears, they may yet be healed” [Ryle, 211].

The disciples themselves were surprised that they could not drive out the demon: **“Then the disciples came to Jesus in private and asked, ‘Why couldn’t we drive it out?’ He replied, ‘Because you have so little faith. I tell you the truth, if you have faith as small as a mustard seed, you can say to this mountain, ‘Move from here to there’ and it will move. Nothing will be impossible for you. But this kind does not go out except by prayer and fasting”**” (vss. 19–21). The disciples, it seems, treated the gift of healing given to them by Jesus, as a sort of magic, which they could use unconditionally, when and where they wanted. We learn here that the spiritual gifts of God are not unconditional, but must be accompanied by faith, and dependence on God. “Unbelief, and other unrepented sins, may mar the exercise of most excellent gifts” [Dickson, 205]. And in this particular case, it was necessary that the gift of healing be accompanied by other spiritual weapons in order to be successful: **“But this kind does not go out except by prayer and fasting”** (vs. 21). “When we find Satan strong and violent, and not yielding ground to us, when He is opposed, or set upon by us, then must we set an edge upon our faith by prayer and an edge upon our prayer, by fasting and separation of ourselves unto the exercise of prayer” [Dickson, 206]. In fact, undoubtedly, if the disciples went about exercising their gift properly by faith and dependence on God, the Spirit of God would have led them to success through leading them to prayer and fasting. “Faith would have suggested and supplied these special means: since they were absolutely necessary in the case if the disciples were to succeed in it, faith would have exercised herself in them” [Spurgeon, 240].

Jesus teaches us of the power of God that can be exercised through the faith of His people: **“I tell you the truth, if you have faith as small as a mustard seed, you can say to this mountain, ‘Move from here to there’ and it will move. Nothing will be impossible to you”** (vs. 20). Of course, for us to move a mountain through faith, it must be commissioned to us by God to move the mountain, just as it was commissioned by Jesus to the disciples to drive out demons (see Matt. 10:1, 8). “It is possible to misunderstand the will of God and to try to move a mountain that should not be moved. In that case the believer will be disappointed” [Morris, 449]. “He does not mean that God will give us whatever comes heedlessly into our minds or mouths. In fact, since there is nothing more contradictory to faith than the foolish and unconsidered wishes of our flesh, it follows that where faith reigns there is no asking for anything indiscriminately” [Calvin]. However, when commissioned by God, we can do great things, with even a tiny amount of faith, **“faith as small as a mustard seed.”** “It is not necessary to have great faith; even a small faith is enough, as long as it is faith in the great God” [Morris, 449].

# A Topical Study: Self-Examination



## The Necessity of Self-Examination, pt. 7 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 7

*Self-examination respecting charity towards our neighbors, and conversation with them.*

I desire you would examine yourselves, 1. Whether you do not live in the neglect of the duties of charity towards your neighbour. You may live in sin towards your neighbour, though you cannot charge yourselves with living in any injustice in your dealings. Here also I would mention two things.

(1.) Whether you are guilty of sinfully withholding from your neighbour who is in want. Giving to the poor, and giving liberally and bountifully, is a duty absolutely required of us. It is not a thing left to personal choice to do as they please; nor is it merely a thing commendable in persons to be liberal to others in want, but it is a duty as strictly and absolutely required and commanded as any other duty whatsoever. This is a duty from which God will not acquit us (as you may see in Deut. 15:7, 8, etc.) and the neglect of this duty is very provoking to God: **“Whoso stoppeth his ears at the cry of the poor, he also himself shall cry, and not be heard.”** (Prov. 21:13). Inquire, therefore, whether you have not lived in a way of sin in this regard. Do you not see your neighbour suffer, and pinched with want, and you, although sensible of it, harden your hearts against him; and are careless about it? Do you not in such a case, neglect to inquire into his necessities, and to do something for his relief? Is it not your manner to hide your eyes in such cases, and to be so far from devising liberal things, and endeavouring to find out the proper objects and occasions of charity, that you rather contrive to avoid the knowledge of them? Are you not apt to make objections to such duties, and to excuse yourselves? And are you not sorry for such occasions, on which you are forced to give something, or expose your reputation? — Are not such things

grievous to you? If these things be so, surely you live in sin, and in great sin, and have need to inquire, whether your spot be not such as is not the spot of God's children.

(2.) Do you not live in the neglect of reprovng your neighbour, when you see him going on in a way of sin? This is required of us by the command of God, as a duty of love and charity, which we owe our neighbour: "**Thou shalt not hate thy brother in thine heart; thou shalt in any wise rebuke thy neighbour, and not suffer sin upon him**" (Lev. 19:17). When we see our neighbour going on in sin, we ought to go, and in a Christian way deal with him about it. Nor will it excuse us, that we fear it will have no good effect, we cannot certainly tell what effect it will have. This is past doubt, that if Christians generally performed this duty as they ought to do, it would prevent abundance of sin and wickedness, and would deliver many a soul from the ways of death.

If a man going on in the ways of sin, saw that it was generally disliked and discountenanced, and testified against by others, it would have a strong tendency to reform him. His regard for his own reputation would strongly persuade him to reform; for hereby he would see that the way in which he lives makes him odious in the eyes of others. When persons go on in sin, and no one saith any thing to them in testimony against it, they know not but that their ways are approved, and are not sensible that it is much to their dishonour to do as they do. The approbation of others tends to blind men's eyes, and harden their hearts in sin; whereas, if they saw that others utterly disapprove of their ways, it would tend to open their eyes and convince them.

If others neglect their duty in this respect, and our reproof alone will not be so likely to be effectual; yet that doth not excuse us: for if one singly may be excused, then every one may be excused, and so we shall make it no duty at all.

Persons often need the reproofs and admonitions of others, to make them sensible that the ways in which they live are sinful; for; as hath been already observed, men are often blinded as to their own sins.

2. Examine yourselves, whether you do not live in some way of sin in your conversation with your neighbours. Men commit abundance of sin, not only in the business and dealings, which they have with their neighbours, but in their talk and converse with them.

(1.) Inquire whether you do not keep company with persons at a lewd and immoral behaviour, with persons who do not make conscience of their ways, are not of sober lives, but on the contrary, are profane and extravagant, and unclean in their communication. This is what the word of God forbids, and testifies against: "**Go from the presence of a foolish man, when thou perceives not in him the lips of knowledge**" (Prov. 14:7). "**A companion of fools shall be destroyed**" (Prov. 13:20). The psalmist professes himself clear of this sin: "**I have not sat with vain persons, neither will I go with dissemblers: I have hated the congregation of**

**evil doers, and will not sit with the wicked” (Ps. 26:4, 5).**

Do you not live in this sin? Do you not keep company with such persons? and have you not found them a snare to your souls? If you have any serious thoughts about the great concerns of your souls, have you not found this a great hindrance to you? Have you not found that it hath been a great temptation to you? Have you not been from time to time led into sin thereby? Perhaps it may seem difficult wholly to forsake your old wicked companions. You are afraid they will deride you, and make game of you, therefore you have not courage enough to do it. But whether it be difficult or not, yet know this, that if you continue in such connexions, you live in a way of sin, and, as the Scripture saith, you shall be destroyed. You must either cut off your right hands, and pluck out your right eyes, or else even go with them into the fire that never shall be quenched.

(2.) Consider whether, in your conversation with others, you do not accustom yourselves to evil speaking. How common is it for persons, when they meet together, to sit and spend their time in talking against others, judging this or that of them, spreading ill and uncertain reports which they have heard of them, running down one and another, and ridiculing their infirmities? How much is such sort of talk as this the entertainment of companies when they meet together? And what talk is there which seems to be more entertaining, to which persons will more listen, and in which they will seem to be more engaged, than such talk? You cannot but know how common this is.

Therefore examine whether you be not guilty of this. — And can you justify it? Do you not know it to be a way of sin, a way which is condemned by many rules in the word of God? Are you not guilty of eagerly taking up any ill report which you hear of your neighbour, seeming to be glad that you have some news to talk of, with which you think others will be entertained? Do you not often spread ill reports which you hear of others, before you know what ground there is for them? Do you not take a pleasure in being the reporter of such news? Are you not wont to pass a judgment concerning others, or their behaviour, without talking to them, and hearing what they have to say for themselves? Doth not that folly and shame belong to you, which is spoken of in Prov. 18:13: **“He that answereth a matter before he heareth it, it is folly and shame unto him”?** This is utterly an inquiry, a very unchristian practice, which commonly prevails, that men, when they hear or know of any ill of others, will not do a Christian part in going to talk with them about it, to reprove them for it, but will get behind their backs before they open their mouths, and there are very forward to speak, and to judge, to the hurt be not guilty of this. Consider also how apt you are to be displeased when you hear that others have been talking against you, how forward are you to apply the rules, and to think and tell how they ought first to have come and talked with you about it and not to have gone and spread an ill report of you before they knew what you had to say in your vindication! How ready are persons to resent it, when others meddle with their private affairs, and

busy themselves, and judge, and find fault, and declaim against them! How ready are they to say, it is no business of theirs! Yet are you not guilty of the same?

**(3.)** Is it not your manner to seem to countenance and fall in with the talk of the company in which you are, in that which is evil? When the company is vain in its talk, and falls into lewd discourse, or vain jesting, is it not your manner, in such a case, to comply and fall in with the company, to seem pleased with its talk, if not to join with it, and help to carry on such discourse, out of compliance with your company, though indeed you disapprove of it in your hearts? So inquire, whether it be not your manner to fall in with your companions, when they are talking against others. Do you not help forward the discourse, or at least seem to fall in with their censures, the aspersions they cast on others, and the reflections they make upon their neighbours' characters?

There are some persons, who, in case of difference between persons or parties, are double-tongued, will seem to fall in with both parties. When they are with those on one side, they will seem to be on their side, and to fall in with them in their talk against their antagonists. At another time, when they are with those of the other side, they will seem to comply with them, and will condemn the other party. This is a very vile and deceitful practice. Seeing to be friendly to both before their faces, they are enemies to both behind their backs; and that upon so mean a motive as the pleasing of the party with which they are in company. They injure both parties, and do what in them lies to establish the difference between them. Inquire whether or no this be your manner.

**(4.)** Is it not your manner, not to confine yourselves to strict truth in your conversation with your neighbours? Lying is accounted ignominious and reproachful among men; and they take it in high disdain to be called liars; yet how many are there that do not so govern their tongues, as strictly to confine them to the truth! There are various degrees of transgressing in this kind. Some, who may be cautious of transgressing in one degree, may allow themselves in another. Some, who commonly avoid speaking directly and wholly contrary to truth, in a plain matter of fact; yet perhaps are not strictly true in speaking of their own thoughts, desires, affections, and designs, and are not exact to the truth, in the relations which they give of things in conversation; scruple not to vary in circumstances, to add some things, to make their story the more entertaining; will magnify and enlarge things, to make their relation the more wonderful; and in things wherein their interest or credit is concerned, will make false representations of things: will be guilty of an unwarrantable equivocation, and a guileful way of speaking, wherein they are chargeable with a great abuse of language. In order to save their veracity, words and sentences must be wrested to a meaning quite beside their natural and established signification. Whatever interpretation such men put on their own words, they do not save themselves from the guilt of lying in the sight of God. Inquire whether you be not guilty of living in sin in this particular.

# A Study in Psalms: Psalm 67



[Because of space constraints in this issue, we will take this psalm out of order, as it is a short psalm.—Ed.]

## Psalm 67 - “May the People Praise You, O God”

For the director of music.  
With stringed instruments. A psalm. A song.

- <sup>1</sup>May God be gracious to us and bless us  
and make His face shine upon us, *Selah*
- <sup>2</sup>That Your ways may be known on earth,  
Your salvation among all nations.
- <sup>3</sup>May the peoples praise You, O God;  
may all the peoples praise You.
- <sup>4</sup>May the nations be glad and sing for joy,  
for You rule the peoples justly  
and guide the nations of the earth. *Selah*
- <sup>5</sup>May the peoples praise You, O God;  
may all the peoples praise You.
- <sup>6</sup>Then the land will yield its harvest,  
and God, our God, will bless us.
- <sup>7</sup>God will bless us,  
and all the ends of the earth will fear Him.

This psalm is a beautiful prayer for the universal praise of God. “It is prayer on the highest level. It asks for personal blessing, but its deepest passion is that all peoples may be blessed, and led to praise” [Morgan, 117]. “The Psalmist, or the church, of which he is the spokesman, takes occasion to anticipate the extension of God’s covenanted gifts, both temporal and spiritual, to all the nations of the earth” [Alexander, 290].

The psalmist begins: “**May God be gracious to us and bless us and make His face shine upon us**” (vs. 1). This verse is a paraphrase of the blessing that priests of Israel were commanded to bestow upon the children of Israel (see Num. 6:23ff). It is a good thing to take the prayers of

the Bible and apply them in our prayers.

It is also good to pray for others, not just ourselves. “Our Savior, in teaching us to say, ‘Our Father’, has intimated that we ought to pray with and for others; so the psalmist here prays not, ‘God be merciful to me, and bless me,’ but to *us*, and bless *us*; for we must make supplication for all saints, and be willing and glad to take our lot with them” [Henry].

The prayer that God be “**gracious**”, is a prayer that God’s grace and mercy come upon us. We all need God’s grace and mercy. “The best saints and the worst sinners may unite in this petition” [Spurgeon]. Note the order: first, “**May God be gracious to us**”, then, “**and bless us.**” “God forgives, then He gives; till He be merciful to pardon our sins through Christ, He cannot bless or look kindly on us sinners” [Spurgeon].

The blessing for which the psalmist is praying, is that God may be known throughout the earth: “**...that Your ways may be known on earth, Your salvation among all nations**” (vs. 2). For God to be well known throughout the earth would be a blessing to us all.

Knowledge of two things is prayed for: God’s ways, and His salvation. God’s ways are widely misunderstood. If they weren’t, many more would praise Him. Those who truly understand God’s ways—His goodness; His grace; His righteousness; His holiness—cannot help but worship Him. Likewise, the greatness of God’s salvation is widely undervalued. God’s salvation brings eternal rewards. Who cannot help but praise God for that?

The psalmist next prays that all would join in God’s praise: “**May the peoples praise You, O God; may all the peoples praise You**” (vs. 3). “Mark the sweet order of the blessed Spirit: first, mercy; then, knowledge; last of all, praising of God. We cannot see His countenance except He be merciful to us; and we cannot praise Him except His way be known upon earth. His mercy breeds knowledge; His knowledge, praise” [Boys, in Spurgeon]. “Those that delight in praising God themselves cannot but desire that others also may be brought to praise Him, that He may have the honor of it and they may have the benefit of it” [Henry]. We should desire that *all* people praise God, even our enemies. An effective prayer for bringing peace to our own hearts is to pray for our enemies, to pray for their salvation, to pray that they would praise God. And also, we of course should praise God at all times. “We have comforts increased, the more we praise God for what we have already received. The more vapours go up, the more showers come down; as the rivers receive, so they pour out, and all run into the sea again. There is a constant circular course and recourse from the sea, unto the sea; so there is between God and us; the more we praise Him, the more our blessings come down; and the more His blessings come down, the more we praise Him again; so that we do not so much bless God as bless ourselves. When the springs lie low, we pour a little water into the pump, not to enrich the fountain, but to bring up

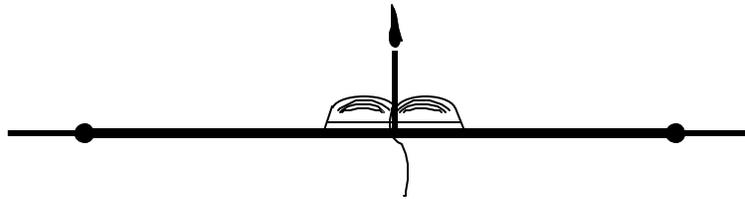
more for ourselves" [Manton, in Spurgeon].

The psalmist continues his prayer for all people: "**May the nations be glad and sing for joy, for You rule the peoples justly and guide the nations of the earth**" (vs. 4). We often are concerned with personal happiness and joy, but national joy is important also. The psalmist prays that the "**nations be glad and sing for joy.**" For a "**nation**" to do so implies that it lives in peace, with good leadership, and domestic tranquility. The psalmist gives a reason for nations to sing with joy: "**...for You rule the peoples justly and guide the nations of the earth**" (vs. 4). "Nations never will be glad till they follow the leadership of the great Shepherd; they may shift their modes of government from monarchies to republics, and from republics to communes, but they will retain their wretchedness till they bow before the Lord of all" [Spurgeon].

The psalmist repeats his refrain: "**May the peoples praise You, O God; may all the peoples praise You**" (vs. 5). "These words are no vain repetition, but are a chorus worthy to be sung again and again" [Spurgeon].

The results of universal praise to God will be beneficial: "**Then the land will yield its harvest, and God, our God, will bless us**" (vs. 6). God blesses His people. If we have the spiritual confidence to truly say God is "**our God**", we will experience God's blessings. For a nation, the foundation of prosperity is for the land to "**yield its harvest**", thus, this is a blessing God bestows on nations that follow Him.

The psalmist ends with a prophetic longing for the time when God will governmentally rule all nations: "**God will bless us, and all the ends of the earth will fear Him**" (vs. 7). Indeed, we should all long for that time when evil will be driven from the land, when God will rule in justice, and when "**all the ends of the earth will fear Him.**"



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**Easter Night**

All night had shout of ment and cry  
Of weoful women filled His way;  
Until that noon of sombre sky  
On Friday, clamour and display  
Smote Him; no solitude had He,  
No silence, since Gethsemane.

Public was death; but Power, but Might,  
But Life again, but Victory,  
Were hushed within the dead of night,  
The shuttered dark, the secrecy,  
And all alone, alone, alone,  
He rose again behind the stone.

-- Alice Meynell (1847 - 1922)

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