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

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Old Testament Study: Exodus

Pharaoh's Compromises, pt. 2 by Arthur W. Pink (1886-1952)

[This is part 2 of a study in which Mr. Pink summarizes the compromises that Pharaoh attempts to make with Moses, as Moses presents Pharaoh with the command of God.]

2. His first compromise firmly repulsed, Pharaoh resorts to another, even more subtle. **“And Pharaoh said, ‘I will let you go, that you may sacrifice to the Lord your God in the wilderness’”** (Ex. 8:28). Ah, that sounded promising. It appeared as though the king was now ready to yield. But mark well his closing and qualifying words — **“only ye shall not go very far away”**. Pharaoh was ready to lengthen the chain, but it was still a chain. Complete liberty he was not ready to grant the Israelites. The point at issue was the complete separation of God's people from Egypt (the world), and this, Pharaoh (representing Satan) contested to the bitter end.

“Only ye shall not go very far away” is one of the favorite and most successful of the Devil's temptations. The Devil would say, “Avoid extremes; do not be fanatical; be sane and sensible in your religious life; beware of becoming narrow-minded, are so many different ways of expressing the same thing. If you really must be a Christian, do not let it spoil your life. There is no need to cut loose from your old friends and associations. God does not want you to be long-faced and miserable. Why then abandon pleasures and recreations innocent in themselves?” With such whisperings Satan beguiles many a soul. Young believers especially need to be on the guard here.

“Not very far away” is incompatible with the first law of the Christian life. The very purpose for which the Lord sent Moses to Pharaoh was to lead His people out of Egypt, and to bring them into the land of Canaan. And in this Moses was a type of the Lord Jesus. The Son of God left heaven for earth that He might take a people from earth to heaven. — bring them there first in spirit and heart, later in person. Set your affection upon things above (Colossians 3:1) is God's call to His children. **“Holy (separated) brethren, partakers of the heavenly calling”** (Hebrews 3:1) is one of our many titles, and Heaven is **“very far away”** from the world! Separation from this world in our interests, our affections, our ways, is the

first law of the Christian life. **“Love not the world, neither the things which are in the world. If any man love the world the love of the Father is not in him”** (1 John 2:15).

But how can the Christian be happy if he turns his back upon all that engaged his mind and heart in the unregenerate days? The answer is very simple: By being occupied with that which imparts a deeper, fuller, more lasting and satisfying joy than anything which this poor world has to offer; by being absorbed with the infinite perfections of Christ; by meditating upon the precious promises of the Word; by serving the Lord; by ministering to the needy. God did not propose to bring His people out of Egypt and give them nothing in return. He would lead them into the wilderness in order that they might **“hold a feast unto the Lord”**. True, the **“feast”** (fellowship) is now **“in the wilderness”**, but the wilderness is Heaven begun when we are delighting ourselves with Christ; in His presence there is **“fullness of joy”** (Ps. 16:11).

After all, Pharaoh was only dissembling. As soon as the plague of flies was removed, he **“hardened his heart neither would he let the people go”** (Ex. 8:32). But he reckoned without God. Heavier judgments were now sent upon his land, which brought the king to his knees, yet not in genuine repentance and submission.

3. **“And Moses and Aaron were brought again unto Pharaoh; and he said unto them, ‘Go, serve the Lord your God; but who are they that shall go?’ And Moses said, ‘We will go with our young and with our old, with our sons and with our daughters, with our flocks and with our herds will we go; for we must hold a feast unto the Lord.’ And he said unto them, ‘Let the Lord be so with you, as I will let you go, and your little ones; look to it; for evil is before you. Not so; go now ye that are men,”** (i.e., only the men are to go; not the women and children) **“and serve the Lord; for that ye did desire.’ And they were driven out from Pharaoh’s presence”** (Exodus 10:8-11, AV).

This was surely a cunning wile of Satan — professing willingness to let the men go if they would but leave their little ones behind in Egypt. Thereby he would have falsified the testimony of the Lord’s redeemed ones, and retained a most powerful hold upon them through their natural affections. For how could they have done with Egypt as long as their children were there? Satan knew this, and hence the character of this temptation. And how many Christians there are who become entangled in this snare! Professing to be the Lord’s, to have left Egypt, they allow their families to remain behind. As another has said, “Parents in the wilderness, and their children in Egypt — terrible anomaly! This would only have been a half deliverance; at once useless to Israel, and dishonoring to Israel’s God. This could not be. If the children remained in Egypt, the parents could not possibly be said to have left it, inasmuch as their children were part of themselves. The most that could be said in such a case was, that in part they were serving Jehovah, and in part Pharaoh. But Jehovah

could have no part with Pharaoh. He should either have all or nothing. This is a weighty principle for Christian parents. It is our happy privilege to count on God for our children and to bring them up in the nurture of the Lord! These admirable words should be deeply pondered in the presence of God. For nowhere does our testimony so manifestly break down as in our families. Godly parents, whose walk is blameless, are seduced into permitting their children practices which they would not for one moment allow in themselves, and thus to flood their houses with the sounds and sights of Egypt" (Ed. Dennett).

Be a Christian, says Satan, if you really must, but do not force religion upon the members of your family, and especially do not tease your children with it. They are too young to understand such things. Let them be happy now; time enough for serious concerns when they grow up. If you press spiritual things upon them today, you will nauseate them, and drive them to infidelity. Thus the Devil argues, and only too many professing Christians heed his siren voice. Family discipline is relaxed, the Scriptures are not given their proper place, the children are allowed to choose their own companions, and no real effort is made to bring them out of Egypt.

The training of children is a most solemn responsibility, and in these days of laxity and lawlessness, an increasingly serious problem. No little grace is needed to defy the general trend of our day, and to take a firm stand. But the Word of God is plain and pointed. "**Train up a child in the way he should go**" (Proverbs 22:6). For this the parent needs to be daily cast upon God, seeking wisdom and strength each hour from Him. The "**training**" cannot start too early. Just as a wise gardener begins, while the trees are young and tender to train the branches along the wall, so should we begin with our children in their most tender years. God has declared, "**Them that honor Me, I will honor**" (1 Samuel 2:30). The first lines the Christian's children should be taught are not nursery rhymes and fairy tales, but short and appropriate verses of Scripture. The first truths which need to be pressed upon the little one are the claims that God has upon all His creatures — that He should be revered, loved, obeyed. That the child is a lost sinner, in need of a Savior, cannot be taught him too early. If it be objected that he is too young to understand such things, the answer is: Salvation does not come to any through understanding, but — through *faith*, and faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God (see Rom. 10:17). And to give the children God's Word is the binding and daily duty of every parent. You cannot lawfully transfer this duty to someone else. Not the Sunday-School teacher but the parent is the one whom God holds responsible to teach the children.

"While on this subject of training children, we would, in true brotherly love, offer a suggestion to all Christian parents, as to the immense importance of inculcating a spirit of implicit obedience. If we mistake not, there is a very widespread failure in this respect, for which we have to judge ourselves before God. Whether through a false tenderness, or indo-

lence, we suffer our children to walk according to their own will and pleasure, and the strides which they make along this road are alarmingly rapid. They pass from stage to stage, with more than railroad speed, until at length they reach the terrible goal of despising their parents altogether, throwing their authority entirely overboard, and trampling beneath their feet the holy order of God, and turning the domestic circle into a scene of godless misrule and confusion.

“How dreadful this is we need not say, or how utterly opposed to the mind of God, as revealed in His Holy Word. But have we not ourselves to blame for it? God has put into the parent’s hands the reins of government and the rod of authority; but if parents through indolence suffer the reins to drop from their hands, and if through false tenderness or moral weakness, the rod of authority is not applied, need we marvel if the children grow up in utter lawlessness? How could it be otherwise? Children are, as a rule, very much what we make them. If they are made to be obedient, they will be so; and if they are allowed to have their own way, the result will be accordingly” (C.H.M.)

Here, then, in part at least, is what is signified by the believer leaving his children behind in Egypt. It is permitting them to have their own way. It is allowing them to be **“conformed to this world”** (see Rom. 12:2). It is bringing them up without the fear of God upon them. It is neglecting their soul’s interests. It is ignoring the command of God to **“bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord”** (Ephesians 6:4). It is failure to follow in the steps of **“our father Abraham,”** of whom the Lord said. **“For I know him, that he will command his children, and his household after him, and they shall keep the way of the Lord”** (Genesis 18:19). The standard which God sets before Christian parents now is certainly not a lower one than what He placed before Israel of old, and to them He said, **“And these words, which I command thee this day, shall be in thine heart; And thou shalt teach them diligently unto thy children, and shalt talk of them when thou sittest in thy house, and when thou walkest by the way, and when thou liest down, and when thou riseth up”** (Deuteronomy 6:6,7). May Divine grace be earnestly sought and freely granted those of our readers who are fathers and mothers to enable them to turn a deaf ear to Satan who pleads that the little ones may be left behind in Egypt!

4. **“And Pharaoh called unto Moses, and said, ‘Go ye, serve the Lord; only let your flocks and your herds be stayed’”** (Exodus 10:24). “With what perseverance did Satan dispute every inch of Israel’s way out of the land of Egypt! He first sought to keep them in the land, then to keep them near the land, next, to keep part of themselves in the land, and finally, when he could not succeed in any of these three, he sought to send them forth without any ability to serve the Lord. If he could not keep the servants, he would seek to keep their ability to serve, which would answer much the same end. If he could not induce them to sacrifice in the land,

he would send them out of the land without sacrifices"! (C.H.M.)

"And Pharaoh called unto Moses and said, 'Go ye, serve the Lord, only let your flocks and your herds be stayed'". This was Pharaoh's last compromise. Mark the word **"only"** again! The distraction of a divided heart, the vain effort to serve two masters, the miserable attempt to make the best of both worlds are suggested here. Demas was caught in this snare (see 2 Timothy 4:10); so also were Ananias and Sapphira. The danger is very real. Where our treasure is, there will our hearts be also (see Matthew 6:21). If our possessions remain in Egypt, so will our affections.

The application of the spiritual principle contained in this fourth compromise is not hard to discover. The flocks and herds of this pastoral people constituted the principle part of what they owned down here. They speak then of our earthly possessions. The issue raised is whether or not God has a title to all that we have. In the light of the Word, the issue is decisively settled. Nothing that we have is really ours: all is committed to us as stewards. And it is right here that so many of us fail. "Give yourselves to God if you must; but do not consecrate your possessions to His service" is the Devil's final plea. And multitudes of professing Christians heed it. Look at the wealth of those who bear the name of Christ. How it has piled up! And where is it all? Surely in Egypt! How much of it is held as a sacred trust for Christ?. Is not the greater part of it used to gratify self! Of old, God charged His people with robbing Him of His tithes and offerings (Malachi 3:8). And the same charge can justly be laid against most of us today.

The answer made by Moses, to this temporizing of Pharaoh, is very striking: **"And Moses said, 'Thou must give us also sacrifices and burnt offerings, that we may sacrifice unto the Lord our God. Our cattle also shall go with us; there shall not an hoof be left behind; for thereof must we take to serve the Lord our God; and we know not with what we must serve the Lord until we come thither'"** (Ex. 10:25, 26). Observe two things; **"Not an hoof"** must be left behind. The spiritual application of this is far-reaching. We may place our money at the Lord's disposal but reserve our time for ourselves. We may be ready to pray but not to labor; or labor and not pray. **"Not an hoof"** means that all that I have and am is held at the disposal of the Lord. Finally, it is striking to observe that Israel would not know the full Divine claims upon their responsibility until they reached the wilderness. The mind of God could not be discerned so long as they remained in Egypt! We might easily have enlarged upon these compromises of Pharaoh at much greater length, but sufficient has been said, we trust, to put each Christian reader upon his guard against the specious temptations which the great Enemy of souls constantly brings to bear upon us. Let us faithfully recognize the fullness of God's claims upon us, and then seek daily grace to walk worthy of the vocation wherewith we have been called.

A Classic Study: The Value of a Good Name



A Classic Study by Richard Greenham (1531–1591)

[Here we continue a study by the esteemed servant of God, Richard Greenham, concerning the importance of having a good name in the community.]—*Ed.*

Of a Good Name, pt. 2

A good name is to be desired above great riches, and loving favour above silver and gold. (Prov. 22:1, AV).

Now the instructions, which we may gather out of this place are chiefly two. The first is, that we ought not to hurt our neighbors, above all things, in their good name: and therefore the Lord in his law hath ordained, that he which does such a thing, should have the same punishment which he purposed to bring on another. Men would be loath to steal the goods of any man from him, and the name of a man is more worth than all things in the world: therefore if any man be raising up false reports do impair his brother's credit, he does hurt him, and sins more grossly, and more grievously, than if he had taken away his lands or his living, his corn, or his cattle, or any other thing which he has. And though the thing be found to be false which he reports, yet he sins nevertheless: for after that time even good men will be more suspicious, and the wicked will not let it go out of their minds.

The second instruction is, that we must be careful by all good means to get and maintain our good name. For if we be charged to further the good name of our brother, that we are straightly commanded to help forward our own as much as we be able: then it cannot be without great sin that a man should cast off all care of his own credit. The very heathen saw this to be a fault, and they did commonly say, that whosoever regards not the reports of men, he is dissolute indeed, and hath not the nature of man. And therefore we may well say, that he is without all hope of amendment, who is not brought to some remorse and sorrow. As then a shameless face opens doors to all ungodliness, so due care of credit causes a man to be very careful of his wares: whosoever therefore will live godly, he must safely provide for his good name. Seeing these things be so, it shall be profitable to consider how this good name may be gotten and preferred: and again, if we be discredited, what use and profit we must make of it.

For the first, it is certain that seeing fame and honest report are good

things, therefore they must needs arise and spring of those things that are good, as of virtue, godliness, and good religion. Now whereas some ungodly men have great favor amongst the people, and be well reported of, this is no good name, because it ariseth not of goodness, it is only a vain applause among the people: nay it is even the great and fierce wrath of God upon them, though they neither see nor perceive it, when they be well spoken of for their evil deeds. For, by this means, they be hardened in their sin. By this means they be hindered and held for repentance, which there is not a greater punishment under the sun. Such a name then is not to be desired. Nay, we ought rather to pray against such a name. And if we will be famous and of good report, then let us take heed that we seek it by goodness and virtue, and then it will be a good name indeed. But let us weigh these things more particularly, and let us know that the first step to a good name is the careful and continual avoidance of evil, both outward and inward.

In outward and gross evils we must first beware of all evils generally: which thing if we be not careful to do, then will our good name be soon impaired. Secondly, we must narrowly look onto some special sins, whereunto our nature is more inclinable and subject: for as one dead fly corrupteth a whole box of ointment, though it be most precious, so some one sin does crack the credit of a man, though otherwise he hath been very well reported of. And if it behooves every man to look to his ways, then much more is it needful, that every child of God should do. For the world, through the hatred it bears to them, deals with them as it deals with witches and physicians. The witch, though she fails in twenty things, yet she do some one thing right. Though it be but final, the world loves and commends her for a good and wise woman. But the Physician, if he work six hundred cures, yet if through the waywardness of his patients, or for the punishment of his patient's sin, he fails but in one, that one failure does more turn to his discredit, than his manifold goodly and notable cures do get him praise. In this manner does the world deal with men, if a worldly man have but an outward gift of strength, speech, or comeliness, he shall be greatly praised, and counted a godly man, though he be an idolater, or a profane person, and though he swims and flows over in all manner of vices. But let the child of God be truly zealous in true religion, let him be honest and holy in conversation, yet if there be one infirmity in him, or if he have through weakness fallen once into some one sin, that one infirmity against which he straineth, on that one sin for which he is grieved, shall drown all the graces of God in him, be they never so great, and the world will account him a most wicked man.

Seeing then this is the enmity of the world against God's people, how warily ought they to walk in so crooked and forward a generation? And hereof they must be so much the more careful, because the wicked by such slips and infirmities, will not only take occasion to discredit them, but even to speak of all their profession, yea, and to blaspheme the glorious

word of God and His eternal truth.

Then if we be careful of our own name, nay if we have any zeal of God's glory, if we have any care of the word, if we have any love of the saints, then let us carefully shun all and every infirmity, whereby God's name is dishonored, His glorious Gospel blasphemed, His children grieved, and we ourselves discredited among the wicked, and thus much for the open and outward sin. As open sin committed in the sight and view of men has always the punishment of an evil name joined with it: so also secret sins which are hidden as it were in the dark corners of our hearts, do bring us out of favor and credit with God: and when we be once out of credit with Him, then does He make our sins further known unto men. For nothing is so hidden, that shall not be brought to the light, and nothing so secret, that shall not be discovered in the sight of the world. And that we may further be persuaded of this, let us all know of a surety, that the Lord has many means to bring such things to light: for He can make the fields to have eyes to see our wickedness, He can make the woods to have ears to hear our ungodly counsels; yea He can cause the walls of our bedchambers to bear witness for the sins committed on our beds. If this will not serve, He can go further, and cause our friends to fall out with us, and the men of our counsels to betray our wickedness. And though he hath not any such purpose when we make him privy to our naughty devils, yet in displeasure the Lord does cause him all at once to lay open all our secrets. Yea rather than thou should bear no reproach for thy secret faults, the Lord will cause thine own mouth to testify against thee, and your own words will give you discredit: for either unawares you shall betray thyself, or in thy sleep by dreams you shall make the thing known, or in sickness thou shall rave of it, or in some frenzy you shall vomit it out, or else the torment of your own conscience shall be so sharp that even to thine own shame you shall confess the fault. Last of all, when you think or devise evil against your neighbor, though it be never so secretly, yet besides all the former, the Lord has another means where He will bring thee to discredit for it.

And this is a very vehement suspicion raised up in the heart of him of whom devises the evil against thine neighbor, for as it comes to pass, that good motions which arise secretly in thy mind for the good of another, do cause the other man to think well of you, though he did never hear of them, no doubt does it often come to pass in evil motions. You devise evil against another. He in some strange manner hath a heart burning in jealousy over thee. You think hardly of another man, and he also is hardly persuaded of thee. Thus the Lord does cause you to be discredited in the hearts of others, as you manage some evil against others in thine heart. True it is, that the party may sin and do very ill if he suspect without just cause, inasmuch as he does thus suspect through an immoderate love of himself. Yet the work of the Lord is here to be considered, who seeing the cause to be so just, does stir up such suspicions in his mind.



New Testament Study: Matthew 19:13-22

The Rich, Young Man Seeking Life

¹³Then little children were brought to Jesus for Him to place His hands on them and pray for them. But the disciples rebuked those who brought them. ¹⁴Jesus said, “Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these.” ¹⁵When He had placed His hands on them, He went on from there.

¹⁶Now a man came up to Jesus and asked, “Teacher, what good thing must I do to get eternal life?”

¹⁷“Why do you ask me about what is good?” Jesus replied. “There is only One who is good. If you want to enter life, obey the commandments.”

¹⁸“Which ones?” the man inquired.

Jesus replied, “Do not murder, do not commit adultery, do not steal, do not give false testimony, ¹⁹honor your father and mother,’ and ‘love your neighbor as yourself.’”

²⁰“All these I have kept,” the young man said. “What do I still lack?”

²¹Jesus answered, “If you want to be perfect, go, sell your possessions and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me.”

²²When the young man heard this, he went away sad, because he had great wealth.

Jesus ever and always spoke out in support of the lowliest in society. He had just finished speaking in support of the women in that society, forbidding men to divorce them for any and every reason. Here, He speaks up for the children: **“Then little children were brought to Jesus for Him to place His hands on them and pray for them. But the disciples rebuked those who brought them. Jesus said, ‘Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these.’ When He had placed His hands on them, He went on from there”** (vss. 13–15). The disciples, I suppose, thought that Jesus was doing things too important to be interrupted by mere children. However, bringing people to Jesus should take precedence

over everything else. Jesus overruled the “**rebuke**” that the disciples gave to those who brought the children: “**Jesus said, ‘Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them.’**”

They are wise parents, who bring their children to Jesus. “Parents of these children brought to Christ were performing the high duty of offering their little ones to God in their infancy; for it is never enough to care only for family’s health, education, and deportment. It is, indeed, an inadequate parent who is concerned merely for children’s physical welfare or worldly success; his supreme duty is to consider their souls” [Griffith Thomas, 280]. So, parents should heed the words of Jesus throughout the childhood of their children: “**Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them.**” Encourage your children in learning the things of God, and learning about the life and work of Jesus; encourage them in coming to Jesus in prayer; encourage them in the worship of Jesus. Note also, it is un-Christlike to be indifferent to the needs of children.

The children came to Jesus for prayer. Next Matthew relates an episode in which a rich, young man came to Jesus seeking eternal life: “**Now a man came up to Jesus and asked, ‘Teacher, what good thing must I do to get eternal life?’**” (vs. 16). “Oh, that more young men would ask a similar question!” [Spurgeon, 266]. This action, coming to Jesus for eternal life, is nothing but commendable. The man has come to the right place! “Salvation is an individual business: every one who wishes to be saved, must have private personal dealings with Christ about his own soul” [Ryle, 237]. “Here is one who in a day of abounding unbelief comes of his own accord to Christ. He comes not to have a sickness healed; he comes not to plead about a child: he comes about his own soul” [Ryle, 237].

Let us note something here: “We see from the case of this young man, that a person may have desires after salvation, and yet not be saved... We must never forget that good feelings alone in religion are not the grace of God. We may know the truth intellectually; we may often feel pricked in conscience; we may have religious affections awakened within us, have many anxieties about our souls, and shed many tears: but all this is not conversion. It is not the genuine saving work of the Holy Spirit... Not only are good feelings alone not grace, but they are even positively dangerous, if we content ourselves with them” [Ryle, 238]

The rich, young man was under the illusion that he could be holy enough through his own good works to earn in the sight of God eternal life. He was not spiritually mature enough to know that “**all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God**” (Rom. 3:23). However, he must have felt in his conscience that he fell short of pleasing God, for he felt that he had not attained eternal life, and he felt that he needed to ask the question of Jesus: “**Teacher, what good thing must I do to get eternal**

life?” “His problem apparently was that, although he had paid strict attention to the commands of God, he still felt that he was coming short in some way” [Morris, 488].

Jesus first replied: **“Why do you ask me about what is good?”** Jesus replied. **“There is only One who is good”** (vs. 17). Some find this statement of Jesus troubling. It seems to them that Jesus is denying that He Himself is good. That would be the case if Jesus did not answer the man’s question, and said something like: “I am not qualified to answer that question.” However, Jesus did indeed answer the man’s question, and by doing so, was proclaiming that, yes, He Himself *is* the **“only One who is good.”** By asking the man, **“Why do you ask me about what is good?”**, Jesus was urging the man to reflect on the implications of asking the Son of God such a question. The conclusion the rich, young man should draw is that he had come to right place in asking such a question. Jesus was also imparting to the young man the knowledge that only God is good, and that no man can live up to the standards to attain eternal life, for there is **“only One who is good”**. Thus, Jesus was preparing the man for the inevitable result: the man would not be able to do **“the good thing”** that Jesus would ask of him.

Jesus answered the man’s question: **“If you want to enter life, obey the commandments”** (vs. 17). The only way for a man to attain eternal life on his own is to be perfectly holy in the sight of God, by obeying each and every one of God’s commandments. The rich, young man must have felt that he came up short of obeying *all* the commandments, for he tried to get Jesus to narrow the task down. The young man asked: **“Which ones?”**

In answer to **“Which ones?”**, Jesus listed some of God’s commandments: **“Jesus replied, “Do not murder, do not commit adultery, do not steal, do not give false testimony, honor your father and mother,” and “love your neighbor as yourself”**” (vs. 18–19). Here, Jesus cited commandments concerning behavior to other people, the so-called second table of the law. “He stresses the importance of the ethical” [Morris, 490]. The last commandment He cited, **“love your neighbor as yourself”**, summarizes all of the commandments concerning dealings with our fellow man. To have obeyed perfectly this commandment is a tall order, and, I would say, impossible for fallen man. “The last-quoted command summarized the rest, and it ought to have opened the questioner’s eyes to his shortcomings; for who has loved his neighbor as himself?” [Spurgeon, 267].

Nevertheless, the young man told Jesus: **“All these I have kept, the young man said. What do I still lack?”** (vs. 20). “We discover something of his spiritual lack when he says that he has kept all these commandments” [Morris, 490]. The young man didn’t recognize his true

spiritual state. "Perhaps he spoke the truth, as he understood the law" [Spurgeon, 267]. But his claim of keeping all those commandments came from ignorance: ignorance in understanding God's law, and ignorance in understanding himself. "So utterly ignorant is he of the spirituality of God's statutes, that he never doubts that he has perfectly fulfilled them" [Ryle, 239]. "Note, a man may be free from gross sin, and yet come short of grace and glory. His hands may be clean from external pollutions, and yet he may perish eternally in his heart-wickedness" [Henry].

Though the young man believed he kept all of the cited commandments, his conscience told him that he **"still lacked"** the requisite holiness to enter eternal life. "Despite his misconception about his standing as a keeper of commandments, he was clearly conscious that something was missing" [Morris, 491]. Rather than continue citing commandments (which, no doubt, would have resulted in the man continuously claiming innocence), Jesus chose to show the man that he lacked the holiness required by God: **"Jesus answered, 'If you want to be perfect, go, sell your possessions and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me'"** (vs. 21). Note, Jesus said, **"If you want to be perfect..."** Jesus was pointing out that total perfection in the eyes of God is required, if a person wants to attain eternal life by his own works. Such a holy perfection requires one to be one-hundred percent dedicated to God. Jesus apparently sensed that the man's riches were getting in the way of his dedication to doing the will of God. The man's love of his riches was causing him to violate the greatest commandment: **"Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind"** (Matt. 22:37). "Our Lord brings him to the first table of the law: 'Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart'. If he did this, he would be willing, at a divine command, to part with his property, even as Abraham was ready to offer up his son" [Spurgeon, 268].

This request of Jesus' was not unprecedented. Jesus' Twelve Disciples were asked to do the same thing. "This is the challenge He had previously made to the fishermen as they were at their nets (see Matt. 4:19) and to Matthew as he sat at his place of work (see Matt. 9:9). They did not have the riches of this young man, it would seem, but they left what they had and followed Jesus. They were prepared to sacrifice everything; that is the path of the service of God" [Morris, 492]. Then also, throughout the Bible, the holy men of God (as the young rich man thought he was) were asked to do similar things. "The principle involved is supreme devotion to Christ. The test of this is different for different people. Some find it harder to renounce hopes of worldly honor and fame for Christ's sake, than to renounce wealth; and for others the hard trial is to abandon cer-

tain gratifications of the various appetites or of taste. Abraham left his native country at God's command, but became rich and famous. Moses gave up the distinction and refined pleasures of court life, and tried patiently to rule a debased and intractable people. Elisha left his property at the call of God through Elijah. Paul abandoned his ambitious hope of being a great rabbi. All should be willing even to die for Christ (16:24ff), though not many are actually required to do so" [Broadus, 407].

Interestingly, Jesus pointed out to the man that by "**selling his possessions**", the man would not really lose his riches, but would just displace them. Jesus promised that he "**will have treasure in heaven.**" The man apparently did not believe this, or he did not sufficiently value "**treasures in heaven**" (the only true treasures), for he was quite unwilling to do what Christ asked: "**When the young man heard this, he went away sad, because he had great wealth**" (vs. 22). The young man came to Jesus willing to do whatever Jesus asked, so he thought. One might think that the young man, who thought he was so godly and perfect, might have welcomed such advice. On the contrary, "when he was faced with a really great deed, getting rid of all his wealth, the only thing he could do was go away grieving" [Morris, 492]. "At once the weak point in his character is detected. It turns out that, with all his wishes and desires after eternal life, there was one thing he loved better than his soul, and that was his money" [Ryle, 240]. "Those who have much in the world are in the greatest temptation to love it, and to set their hearts upon it. Such is the bewitching nature of worldly wealth, that those who need it least, desire it most; when riches increase, then is the danger of setting the heart upon them (see Ps. 62:10)" [Henry].

The man's reaction to Jesus' advice is full of irony: "**When the young man heard this, he went away sad, because he had great wealth.**" Those of the world think that a person cannot be sad and rich at the same time. How wrong they are! This man was young, and he was rich, yet, "**he went away sad.**" Moreover, it was his riches that made him sad, for "**he went away sad, because he had great wealth.**" Far from bringing happiness, often riches prevent one from attaining true happiness. I have no doubt that, had the young man followed Jesus' advice, he would have lived a blissfully happy, spiritually rich, life.

Nevertheless, though we are to strive always to do the will of God, it is a mistake for us to think that we can attain eternal life through our own works. Asking our Lord the question, "**what do I still lack?**", is to invite discovery of our shortcomings. We must come to God seeking mercy, finding eternal life only through His Son. Instead of saying, "**what do I still lack?**" (for the list will go on forever), we should plead with God: "You supply what I lack, through Your Son, Jesus Christ."

A Topical Study: On Prayer



[Here we continue a series on Prayer. The first study in this series, which is concluded here, is by Jonathan Edwards, concerning our God being a God who hears our prayers.]—*Ed.*

The Most High a Prayer-Hearing God, pt. 3 by Jonathan Edwards (1703-1758)

O Thou that hearest prayer. (Ps. 65:2, AV).

APPLICATION.

How highly we are privileged, in that we have the Most High revealed to us as a God that heareth prayer. The greater part of mankind are destitute of this privilege. Whatever their necessities are, whatever their calamities or sorrows, they have no prayer-hearing God to whom they may go. If they go to the gods whom they worship, and cry to them ever so earnestly, it will be in vain. They worship either lifeless things that can neither help them, nor know that they need help; or wicked cruel spirits, who are their enemies, and wish nothing but their misery; and who, instead of helping them, are from day to day working their ruin, and watching over them as a hungry lion watches over His prey.

How are we distinguished from them, in that we have the true God made known to us: a God of infinite grace and mercy a God full of compassion to the miserable, who is ready to pity us under all our troubles and sorrows, to hear our cries, and to give us all the relief which we need; a God who delights in mercy, and is rich unto all that call upon Him! How highly privileged are we, in that we have the holy word of this same God, to direct us how to seek for mercy! And whatever difficulties or distress we are in, we may go to Him with confidence and great encouragement. What a comfort may this be to us! And what reason have we to rejoice in our privileges, to prize them so Highly, and to bless God that He hath been so merciful to us as to give us His word, and reveal Himself to us; and that He hath not left us to cry for help to stocks and stones, and devils, as He has left many thousands of others.

OBJECTION.

I have often prayed to God for certain mercies, and He has not heard my prayers. — To this I answer,

1. It is no argument, that God is not a prayer-hearing God, if He gives not to men what they ask of Him to consume upon their lusts. Oftentimes when men pray for temporal good things, they desire them for no good end, but only to gratify their pride or sensuality. If they pray for worldly good things chiefly from a worldly spirit, and make an idol of the world, it is no wonder that God doth not hear their prayers: **“Ye ask, and receive not, because ye ask amiss, to consume it upon your lusts”** (James 4:3). If you request Him to give you something of which you will make an idol, and set up in opposition to Him — or will use as weapons of warfare against Him, or as instruments to serve His enemies — no wonder that God will not hear you. If God should hear such prayers, He would act as His own enemy, inasmuch as He would bestow them to serve His enemies.

2. It is no argument that God is not a prayer-hearing God, that He heareth not insincere and unbelieving prayers. How can we expect that He should have any respect to that which has no sincerity in it! God looketh not at words, but at the heart, and it is fit that He should do so. If men pray only in words, and not in heart, what are their prayers good for? And why should that God who searches the heart, and tries the reins, have any respect to them? — Sometimes men do nothing but dissemble in their prayers, and when they do so, it is no argument that God is the less a prayer-hearing God, that He doth not hear such prayers, for it is no argument of want of mercy. Sometimes they pray for that in words which they really desire not in their hearts, as that He would purge them from sin, when at the same time they show by their practice that they do not desire to be purged from sin, while they love and choose it, and are utterly averse to parting with it. In like manner, they often dissemble in the presence and show, which they make in their prayers, of dependence on God for mercies, and of a sense of His sufficiency to supply them. In our coming to God, and praying to Him for such and such things, there is a show that we are sensible we are dependent on Him for them, and that He is sufficient to give them to us. But men sometimes seem to pray, while not sensible of their dependence on God, nor do they think Him sufficient to supply them; for all the while they trust in themselves, and have no confidence in God. — They show in words as though they were beggars; but in heart they come as creditors, and look on God as their debtor. In words they seem to ask for things as the fruit of free grace; but in heart they account it would be hard, unjust, and cruel, if God should deny them. In words they seem humble and submissive, but in heart they are proud and contentious; there is no prayer but in their words.

It doth not render God at all the less a prayer-hearing God, that He

distinguishes, as an all-seeing God, between real prayers and pretended ones. Such prayers as those which I have just now been mentioning, are not worthy of the name in the eyes of Him who searches the heart, and sees things as they are. — That prayer which is not of faith, is insincere; for prayer is a show or manifestation of dependence on God, and trust in His sufficiency and mercy. Therefore, where this trust or faith is wanting, there is no prayer in the sight of God. And however God is sometimes pleased to grant the requests of those who have no faith, yet He has not obliged himself so to do, nor is it an argument of His not being a prayer-hearing God, when He hears them not.

3. It is no argument that He is not a prayer-hearing God that He exercises His own wisdom as to the time and manner of answering prayer. Some of God's people are sometimes ready to think that He doth not hear their prayers, because He doth not answer them at the times when they expected, when indeed God doth hear them, and will answer them, in the time and way to which His own wisdom directs. — The business of prayer is not to direct God, who is infinitely wise, and needs not any of our directions; who knows what is best for us ten thousand times better than we, and knows what time and what way are best. It is fit that He should answer prayers and, as an infinitely wise God, in the exercise of His own wisdom, and not ours. God will deal as a father with us, in answering our requests. But a child is not to expect that the father's wisdom be subject to His nor ought He to desire it, but should esteem it a privilege that the parent will provide for Him according to His own wisdom.

As to particular temporal blessings for which we pray, it is no argument that He is not a prayer-hearing God, because He bestows them not upon us; for it may be that God sees the things for which we pray, not to be best for us. If so, it would be no mercy in Him to bestow them upon us, but a judgment. Such things, therefore, ought to always to be asked with submission to the divine will. God can answer prayer, though He bestow not the very thing for which we pray. He can sometimes better answer the lawful desires and good end we have in prayer another way. If our end be our own good and happiness, God can perhaps better answer that end in bestowing something else than in the bestowment of that very thing which we ask. And if the main good we aim at in our prayer be attained, our prayer is answered, though not in the bestowment of the individual thing which we sought. And so that may still be true which was before asserted, that God always hears the prayer *of faith*. God never once failed of hearing a sincere and believing prayer; and those promises for ever hold good, **“Ask, and ye shall receive; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened to you: for every one that asketh, receiveth and He that seeketh, findeth; and to Him that knocketh, it shall be opened.”** (Matt. 7:7-8).

Another use of this doctrine may be of reproof to those that neglect the duty of prayer. If we enjoy so great a privilege as to have the prayer-

hearing God revealed to us, how great will be our folly and inexcusable-ness if we neglect the privilege, or make no use of it, and deprive ourselves of the advantage by not seeking this God by prayer. They are hereby re-proved who neglect the great duty of secret prayer, which is more expressly required in the word of God than any other kind. What account can those persons give of themselves, who neglect so known a duty? It is impossible that any among us should be ignorant of this command of God. How daring, therefore, is their wickedness who live in the neglect of this duty! and what can they answer to their Judge, when He shall call them to an account for it?

Here I shall briefly say something to an *excuse* which some may be ready to make for themselves. Some may be ready to say, "If I do pray, my prayer will not be the prayer of faith, because I am in a natural condition, and have no faith."

This excuses not from obedience to a plain command of God. The command is to all to whom the command shall come. God not only directs godly persons to pray, but others also. In the beginning of the second chapter of Proverbs, God directs all persons to cry after wisdom, and to lift up their voices for understanding, in order to their obtaining the fear and knowledge of God; and in James 1:5, the apostle says, "**If any man lack wisdom, let Him ask of God;**" and Peter directed Simon Magus to repent, and pray to God, if perhaps the thought of His heart might be forgiven Him (see Acts 8:22). Therefore when God says, do thus or thus, it is not for us to make excuses, but we must do the thing required. Besides, God is pleased sometimes to answer the prayers of unbelievers. Indeed He hears not their prayers for their goodness or acceptableness, or because of any true respect to Him manifested in them, for there is none; nor has He obliged himself to answer such prayers; yet He is pleased sometimes, of His sovereign mercy, to pity wicked men, and hear their cries. Thus He heard the cries of the Ninevites (see Jonah 3), and the prayer of Ahab, (see 1 Kings 21:27,28). Though there be no regard to God in their prayers, yet He, of His infinite grace, is pleased to have respect to their desires of their own happiness, and to grant their requests. He may, and sometimes does, hear the cries of wicked men as He hears the hungry ravens, when they cry (see Psalm 147:9). and as He opens His bountiful hand, and satisfies the desires of every living thing (see Psalm 145:16). Besides the prayers of sinners, though they have no goodness in them, yet are made a means of a preparation for mercy.

Finally, seeing we have such a prayer-hearing God as we have heard, let us be much employed in the duty of prayer: let us pray with all prayer and supplication: let us live prayerful lives, continuing instant in prayer, watching thereunto with all perseverance; praying always, without ceasing, earnestly, and not fainting.

A Study in Psalms: Psalm 68:15-23



Psalm 68:15-23 - The Ascension of the Ark

¹⁵The mountains of Bashan are majestic mountains;
rugged are the mountains of Bashan.

¹⁶Why gaze in envy, O rugged mountains,
at the mountain where God chooses to reign,
where the LORD Himself will dwell forever?

¹⁷The chariots of God are tens of thousands
and thousands of thousands;
the Lord has come from Sinai into His sanctuary.

¹⁸When You ascended on high,
You led captives in Your train;
You received gifts for men,
even for the rebellious—
that You, O LORD God, might dwell there.

¹⁹Praise be to the Lord, to God our Savior,
who daily bears our burdens. *Selah*

²⁰Our God is a God who saves;
from the Sovereign LORD
comes escape from death.

²¹Surely God will crush the heads of His enemies,
the hairy crowns of those
who go on in their sins.

²²The Lord says, "I will bring them from Bashan;
I will bring them from the depths of the sea,

²³that you may plunge your feet
in the blood of your foes,
while the tongues of your dogs
have their share."

Here, we continue our study of this psalm, which David (we believe) wrote to commemorate the bringing of the Ark of the Covenant to Zion. In this section, David begins by comparing Mount Zion with other majestic mountains: **"The mountains of Bashan are majestic mountains; rugged are the mountains of Bashan. Why gaze in envy, O rugged**

mountains, at the mountain where God chooses to reign, where the Lord Himself will dwell forever?" (vss. 15–16). The mountains of Bashan (including Mount Hermon) stood at the northern boundary between Judea and the heathen world. So here, David is using the mountains of Bashan as a symbol of the world's majesty, and comparing those mountains to **"the mountain where God chooses to reign"**, that is, Mount Zion. From the world's viewpoint, the mountains of Bashan were more beautiful and majestic than Mount Zion. Nevertheless, the mountains of Bashan **"gaze in envy"** at Mount Zion, because God dwelled on Zion. The majesty of the mountains of Bashan came from their God-given, rugged features. The majesty of Mount Zion came from God's choice to dwell there. It was a spiritual grandeur, as opposed to the physical grandeur of Bashan. "The kingdoms of this world, especially some of more eminent sort, seem very rich and glorious in comparison of the outward appearance of the kingdom of Christ in His church, as the great, high, and fruitful hill of Bashan seemed to be more glorious, than the hill of Zion; yet, all things being compared, in special the spiritual privileges of the one, with the temporal privileges of the other, the church of God will outreach the most glorious kingdom on the earth" [Dickson, 401].

Note well, God did not choose the grandest, most rugged, nor the highest mountain in which to dwell; just as God does not always choose the strongest, or wisest, or most powerful men of the world in which to dwell by His Spirit. As Paul teaches: **"But God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise; God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong. He chose the lowly things of this world and the despised things and the things that are not—to nullify the things that are, so that no one may boast before Him... Therefore, as it is written: 'Let him who boasts boast in the Lord'"** (I Cor. 1:27–30).

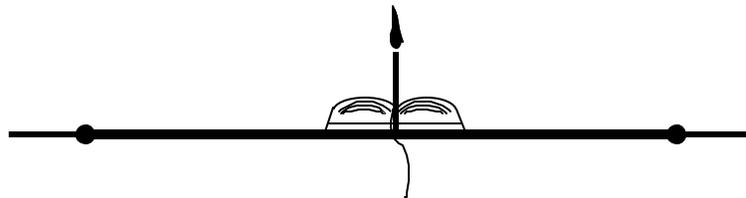
David next describes the ascension of the Ark of the Covenant onto the Mount: **"The chariots of God are tens of thousands and thousands of thousands; the Lord has come from Sinai into His sanctuary. When You ascended on high, You led captives in Your train; You received gifts for men, even for the rebellious—that You, O LORD God, might dwell there"** (vss. 17–18). David describes the ascension of the Ark as a prophetic symbol of the ascension of the Messiah to His throne. David moves in the artistry of the psalm (and by inspiration of the Holy Spirit) from describing the event before him, to prophesying about an event long in the future. Jesus is shown here, ascending to the throne, leading the **"captives in His train"**, freeing them from their captivity to sin, and giving the gift of the Holy Spirit to them. (Note: we are using an alternate translation of this verse. The original translation in the NIV says: **"received gifts from men, even from the rebellious."** However, the AV reads as we have written it). Paul comments on this proph-

ecy in his letter to the Ephesians: **“But to each one of us grace has been given as Christ apportioned it. This is why it says: ‘When He ascended on high, He led captives in His train and gave gifts to men’... It was He who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers”** (Eph, 4:7-8, 11).

At the sight of the ascension of the Ark, David breaks into praise: **“Praise be to the Lord, to God our Savior, who daily bears our burdens. Our God is a God who saves; from the Sovereign Lord comes escape from death”** (vss. 19-20). Our God is a God who cares intimately about each and every one of us. Some see God as only caring about the “large” and “important” matters in the world. However, (praise be to God) He cares about things that are small (from the viewpoint of the world), but that are important personally to us. He is a God **“who daily bears our burdens.”** And what a blessing that He does not just **“bear our burdens”**, but He **“daily bears our burdens.”** This demonstrates His love for us, and for this we should praise Him. “Our praises and thanksgivings should keep pace with the mercies we receive. If God loads us with daily benefits, why should we not daily shout and sing of His love?” [Plumer, 671].

He is also a **“God who saves”** and from Him **“comes escape from death.”** This of course speaks primarily of the work of Christ, who died for us, so that we may have eternal life.

But God is a God of justice, too, and in the end, His enemies will be punished, as David points out: **“Surely God will crush the heads of His enemies, the hairy crowns of those who go on in their sins. The Lord says, ‘I will bring them from Bashan; I will bring them from the depths of the sea, that you may plunge your feet in the blood of your foes, while the tongues of your dogs have their share’”** (vss. 21-23). Yes, God is a God of love, and He is a patient God, but His patience will not last forever. For those who reject Him, and the gift of eternal life that He gave us through His Son, there will be dire consequences. “It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God (Heb. 10:31). Surely the Lord would not use such terrific language as he does respecting the doom of sinners, if it were not inconceivably dreadful. Nothing can protect persistent and obstinate offenders from the sword of Divine Justice (see Amos 9:3,4; Obad. 4)” [Plumer, 672].



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Thanksgiving

"In one of the first Summer after their [the Pilgrims in America] sitting down at Plymouth, a terrible drought threatened the ruin of all their summer's husbandry. From about the middle of May to the middle of July, an extreme hot sun beat upon their fields, without any rain, so that all their corn began to wither and languish, and some of it was irrecoverably parched up. In this distress they set apart a day for fasting and prayer, to deprecate the calamity that might bring them to fasting through famine; in the morning of which day there was no sign of any rain; but before the evening the sky was overcast with clouds, which went not away without such easy, gentle, and yet plentiful showers, as revived a great part of their decayed corn, for a comfortable harvest. The Indians themselves took notice of this answer given from heaven to the supplications of this devout people; and one of them said, 'Now I see that the Englishman's God is a good God; for He hath heard you, and sent you rain, and that without such tempest and thunder as we use to have with our rain; which after our Powawing for it, breaks down the corn; whereas your corn stands whole and good still; surely, your God is a good God.' The harvest which God thus gave to this pious people, caused them to set apart another day for solemn Thanksgiving to the glorious Hearer of Prayers!"

Cotton Mather (1663-1729)

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