

# SCRIPTURE STUDIES

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

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May God bless you as you study His Word.



## Old Testament Study: Exodus 15:1-2

### Israel's Song, pt. 1 by Arthur W. Pink (1886-1952)

<sup>1</sup>Then Moses and the children of Israel sang this song to the Lord, and spoke, saying: "I will sing to the Lord, for He has triumphed gloriously! The horse and its rider He has thrown into the sea! <sup>2</sup>The Lord is my strength and song, and He has become my salvation; He is my God, and I will praise Him; my father's God, and I will exalt Him."

Exodus 15 contains the first song recorded in Scripture. Well has it been said, "It is presumably the oldest poem in the world, and in sublimity of conception and grandeur of expression, it is unsurpassed by anything that has been written since. It might almost be said that poetry here sprang full-grown from the heart of Moses, even as heathen mythology fables Minerva come full-armed from the brain of Jupiter. Long before the ballads of Homer were sung through the streets of the Grecian cities, or the foundation of the Seven-hilled metropolis of the ancient world was laid by the banks of the Tiber, this matchless ode, in comparison with which Pindar is tame, was chanted by the leader of the emancipated Hebrews on the Red Sea shore; and yet we have in it no polytheism, no foolish mythological story concerning gods and goddesses, no gilding of immorality, no glorification of mere force; but, instead, the firmest recognition of the personality, the supremacy, the holiness, the retributive rectitude of God. How shall we account for all of this? If we admit the Divine legation and inspiration of Moses, all is plain; if we deny that, we have in the very existence of this Song, a hopeless and insoluble enigma. Here is a literary miracle, as great as the physical sign of the parting of the Sea. When you see a boulder of immense size, and of a different sort of stone from those surrounding it, lying in a valley, you immediately conclude that it has been brought hither by glacier action many, many ages ago. But here is a boulder-stone of poetry, standing all alone in the Egyptian age, and differing entirely in its character from the sacred hymns either of Egypt or of India. Where did it come from? Let the rationalist furnish his reply; for me it is a boulder from the Horeb height whereon Moses communed with the great I AM — when he saw the bush that burned but yet was not consumed — and left here as at once a witness to his inspiration, and the nations' gratitude" (W. M. Taylor, "Moses the Law-giver").

This first Song of Scripture has been rightly designated the Song of

Redemption, for it proceeded from the hearts of a redeemed people. Now there are two great elements in redemption, two parts to it. We may say: redemption is by *purchase* and by *power*. Redemption therefore differs from ransoming, though they are frequently confounded. Ransoming is but a part of redemption. The two are clearly distinguished in Scripture. Thus, in Hosea 13:14, the Lord Jesus by the Spirit of Prophecy declares, **“I will ransom them from the power of the grave; I will redeem them from death.”** And again we read, **“For the Lord hath redeemed Jacob and ransomed him from the hand of him that was stronger than he”** (Jeremiah 31:11). So in Ephesians 1:14 we read, **“which is the earnest of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession.”** Ransoming is the payment of the price; redemption, in the full sense, is the *deliverance* of the persons for whom the price was paid. It is the latter which is the all-important item. Of what use is the ransom if the captive be not released? Without actual emancipation there will be no song of praise. Who would ever thank a ransomer that left him in bondage? The Greek word for “redemption” is rendered “*deliverance*” in Hebrews 11:35 — **“And others were tortured not accepting deliverance.”** **“Not accepting deliverance”** means release from their affliction, i.e., not accepting it on the terms of their persecutors, namely, upon condition of apostasy. The twofold nature of redemption is the key to that wondrous and glorious vision described in Revelation 5. The **“book”** there, is the Redeemer’s title deeds to the earth. Hence His dual character; **“Lamb”** — the Purchaser; **“Lion”** — the powerful Emancipator.

On the Passover-night, Israel was secured from the *doom* of the Egyptians; at the Red Sea they were delivered from the *power* of the Egyptians. Thus delivered (**“redeemed”**), they sang. It is only a redeemed people, conscious of their deliverance that can really praise Jehovah, the Deliverer. Not only is worship impossible for those yet dead in trespasses and sins, but intelligent worship cannot be rendered by professing Christians who are in doubt as to their standing before God. And necessarily so. Praise and joy are essential elements of worship; but how can those who question their acceptance in the Beloved, who are not *certain* whether they would go to heaven or hell should they die this moment, — how could such be joyful and thankful? Impossible! Uncertainty and doubt beget fear and distrust, and not gladness and adoration. There is a very striking word in Psalm 106:12 which throws light on Exodus 15:1 — **“Then believed they His words; they sang His praise.”**

**“Then sang Moses and the children of Israel this song unto the Lord”** (15:1). **“Then.”** When? When **“the Lord saved Israel that day out of the hand of the Egyptians; and Israel saw the Egyptians dead upon the sea shore”** (14:30). A close parallel is met with in the book of Judges. At the close of the 4th chapter we read, **“So God subdued on that day Jabin the King of Canaan before the children of Israel. And the hand of the children of Israel prospered, and prevailed against Jabin the king of Canaan, until they had destroyed Jabin king of Canaan”** (vv. 23, 24). What is the immediate sequel to this deliverance of

Israel from Jabin? This: **“then sang Deborah and Barak the son of Abinoam on that day, saying, Praise ye the Lord for the avenging of Israel”** (5:1). An even more blessed example is furnished in Isaiah. The 53rd chapter of this prophecy (in its *dispensational* application) contains the confession of the Jewish remnant at the close of the Tribulation period. Then will their eyes be opened to see that the One whom their nation **“despised and rejected”** was, in truth, the Sin-Bearer, the Savior. Once their *faith* lays hold of this, once they have come under the virtue of Christ’s atoning sacrifice, everything is altered. The very first word of Isaiah 54 is, **“Sing O barren thou that didst not bear; break forth into singing.”**

**“Then sang Moses and the children of Israel”** (vs. 1). What a contrast is this from what was before us in the earlier chapters! While in the house of bondage no joyful strains were upon the lips of the Hebrews. Instead, we read that they **“sighed by reason of the bondage, and they cried.... and God heard their groaning”** (Ex. 2:23). But now their sighing gives place to singing; their groans to praising. They are occupied no longer with themselves, but with the Lord. And what had produced this startling change? Two things: the blood of the Lamb, and the power of the Lord. It is highly significant, and in full accord with what we have said above, that we never read in Scripture of *angels* “singing.” In Job 38:7 they are presented as **“shouting,”** and in Luke 2:13 they are seen **“praising”** God, while in Revelation 5:11, 12 we hear them *saying*, **“Worthy is the Lamb.”** Only the redeemed **“sing!”** **“Then sang Moses and the children of Israel this song unto the Lord.”** And what did they sing about? Their song was entirely about Jehovah. They not only sang *unto* the Lord, but they sang *about* Him! It was all concerning Himself, and nothing about themselves. The word **“Lord”** occurs no less than twelve times within eighteen verses! The pronouns **“He,” “Him,” “Thy,” “Thou,”** and **“Thee”** are found thirty-three times!! How significant and how searching is this! How entirely different from modern hymnology! So many hymns today (if “hymns” they deserve to be called) are full of maudlin sentimentality, instead of Divine adoration. They announce *our* love to God instead of *His* for us. They recount our experiences, instead of His mercies. They tell more of human attainments, instead of Christ’s Atonement. ’Tis a sad index of our low state of spirituality! Different far was this Song of Moses and Israel: **“I will exalt Him”** (v. 3), sums it all up. **“I will sing unto the Lord, for He hath triumphed gloriously: the horse and his rider hath He thrown into the sea”** (v. 1).

How many there are who imagine that the first thing for which we should praise God is our *own* blessing, what He has done for *us*! But while that is indeed the *natural* order, it is not the *supernatural*. Where the Spirit of God is fully in control, He always draws out the heart unto God. It was so here. So much was self forgotten, the Deliverer *alone* was seen. **“Out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh”** (Matt. 12:34), and where the heart is really occupied with the Lord, the mouth will tell forth *His* praises. **“The Lord is my strength and song.”** Beautiful and blessed

was this first note struck by God's redeemed. O that *our* hearts were so set upon things above that *He* might be the constant theme of our praise — **“singing and making melody in your hearts unto the Lord”** (Ephesians 5:19). **“I will sing unto the Lord, for He hath triumphed gloriously; the horse and his rider hath He thrown into the sea.”** The *theme* of this song is what the Lord had done: He had delivered His people and destroyed their enemies. Israel began by magnifying the Lord, because in overthrowing the strength of Egypt, He had glorified Himself. This is repeated in various forms: **“Thy right hand O Lord, is become glorious in power: Thy right hand, O Lord, hath dashed in pieces the enemy. And in the greatness of Thine excellency Thou hast overthrown them that rose up against Thee”** (vv. 6, 7). Joy is the spontaneous overflowing of a heart which is occupied with the person and work of the Lord, it ought to be a *continuous* thing — **“Rejoice in the Lord always”** — *in* the Lord, not in your experiences nor circumstances; **“and again I say, Rejoice”** (Philippians 4:4).

**“The Lord is my strength and song”** (v. 2). The connecting of these two things is significant. Divine strength and spiritual song are inseparable. Said Nehemiah, **“The joy of the Lord is your strength”** (8:10). Just as assurance leads to rejoicing, so rejoicing is essential for practical holiness. Just in proportion as we are rejoicing in the Lord shall we have power for our walk.

**“And He is become my salvation”** (v. 2). Not until now could Israel, really, say this. Not until they had been brought right out of the Enemy's land and their foes had been rendered powerless by death, could Israel sing of salvation. It is a very striking thing that never once is a believer found saying this in the book of Genesis. Not that Abel, Enoch, Noah, Abraham, were not saved; truly they were, but the Holy Spirit designedly reserved this confession for the book which treats of “Redemption.” And even here we do not find it until the Red Sea is reached. In 14:13 Moses said, **“Fear ye not, stand still and see the salvation of the Lord, which He will show to you today.”** And now Jehovah *had* “shown” it to them, and they can exclaim, **“The Lord is become my salvation.”** **“He is my God, and I will prepare Him an habitation”** (v. 2). Beautiful is this. A spirit of true devotion is here expressed. An **“habitation”** is a dwelling-place. It was Jehovah's *presence* in their midst that their hearts desired. And is it not ever thus with the Lord's redeemed — to enjoy *fellowship* with the One who has saved us! True, it is our happy privilege to enjoy communion with the Lord even now, but nevertheless the soul pants for the time when everything that hinders and spoils our fellowship will be forever removed — **“Having a desire to depart, and to be with Christ; which is far better”** (Philippians 1:23). Blessed beyond words will be the full realization of our hope. Then shall it be said, **“Behold the Tabernacle of God is with men, and He will dwell with them. and they shall be His people, and God Himself shall be with them and be their God. And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain; for the former things are passed away”** (Revelation 21:3, 4).



## A Classic Study: The Danger of Prosperity

### A Classic Study by William Bates (1635–1699)

[Here we continue a study by the eminent English Puritan William Bates, concerning the danger of prosperity.]—*Ed.*

### The Danger of Prosperity, pt. 9

**The prosperity of fools shall destroy them. (Prov. 1:32, AV).**

We are to consider the justice, that is, the certainty and the heaviness of the destruction that shall seize on foolish sinners that abuse prosperity.

To illustrate the Justice of God in their destruction, I shall only insist on that reason that is so admirably amplified in this chapter for their conviction: that is, their destruction is the fruit of their own choice. The divine wisdom allures and invites them, by all the most tender and powerful persuasives, to forsake their ruinous course, so that the Spirit of Grace should be poured upon them, which is the earnest of glory; but they would not be convinced and reformed. They hated knowledge, Godliness, though recommended by the assurance of a blessed eternal reward: therefore their destruction is resolved into their own choice. Indeed no man can directly and absolutely choose misery, or reject happiness, but virtually and by real consequence the most do. A prodigal that wastes his estate, does not intentionally and deliberately choose poverty, but thus he thinks, “This expense is for my honor, this for my pleasure...”, and proceeding to innumerable expenses, he at last becomes poor, and his poverty is voluntary, because it is the issue of his voluntary exorbitant profuseness. The evil of sin, though it be destructive, yet it is pleasing to his corrupt nature: and the depraved will is so allured by the present pleasure, that it anticipates the reflections of the mind, and chooses to gratify the propensions of nature, with a brutish disregard of the terrible consequences of sin. And the present inconvenience of serious piety to the carnal heart, causes an averseness from it, notwithstanding the heavenly felicity that is promised to it. Men prefer carnal sweets before communion with God; and though not ignorant of the issue, continue in their sins. And it is the exactness of justice, to deprive sinners of that blessedness which they obstinately refused, and to bring on them the misery they perversely choose. And when at the last day the son of God shall charge upon sinners their neglect of His compassionate and repeated calls, that He often knocked at the door to get an entrance into their hearts, but all in vain, the world was there, and barred it against Him. The guilty graceless souls will be struck with a

defenseless silence, not able to make a request for pardon, but with despairing tears must submit to their righteous condemnation. The equity of God's ways, and the iniquity of men, will at the last be clear to every eye. Then all the blessings they received will rise up in judgment against them, as proofs of their wickedness, which makes them more guilty, and deservedly miserable. The conscience, which is not stupefied by sensuality, will make furious reflections upon the folly of their choice, and be more tormenting than the infernal fiends. When Craesus, the rich king of Lydia, was bound to the stake, and the fire kindled for his burning, he lamentable cried out, "Solon, Solon, Solon"; and being asked the reason of it, declared, that in the height of his prosperity, that wise Greek had advised him to prepare for a revolution from his glory and greatness into a miserable state, and his neglect of that counsel was more tormenting than the loss of his kingdom. How piercing will the remembrance be to lost souls of their despising the instructions, warnings, and gracious methods of the divine wisdom, to have prevented their ruin! That mercy was so often and so rebelliously resisted! This will be the hell of hell.

The certainty of their destruction is next to be considered. It is unchangeably established by the divine ordination that the pleasures of sin shall end in the misery of obstinate sinners. This is declared in the word of God, "**If you live according to the flesh, you shall die**" (Romans 8:13). And as it is founded in distributive justice, so it shall be executed from His truth. Our Savior tells us, "**Heaven and earth shall pass away, but one jot or tittle of the laws shall not be unfulfilled.**" (Matthew 5). All the threatenings of it, in their fearful extent, shall be accomplished upon impenitent sinners, the proper objects of vengeance. God cannot deny Himself in ceasing to be holy and true, and His power seconds His word, to inflict that they might repent: for mercy is not only over all the works of God, but paramount to all His attributes, it suspends His power from acts of vengeance, it delays and mitigates His justice, we may appeal from justice to mercy in the court of heaven: but when God's mercy has been affronted and exasperated, by the continual abuse of His benefits, when it is renounced and forfeited by sinners, their destruction is irreversible. For it is mercy alone atones His righteous anger; and this being so fearfully provoked, there is no advocate in his bosom to plead for them. Did He not expel from heaven the rebellious angels, spirits of a higher order, and more excellent endowments than men, and in their number perhaps exceeding the whole progeny of man? Now as the apostle, considering that the Israelites, the chosen people of God, and dear to Him above all other; yet when they became unfruitful, were broken off from the true olive tree and Gentiles were grafted into it, leaves this caution in eternal memory, "**Be not high-minded, but fear. For if he spared not the natural branches, take heed lest he spare not thee**" (Rom. 11:20-21:). We may strongly infer, if God "**spared not the angels that sinned, in their first act of disobedience, but cast them down into hell, and delivered them in to chains of darkness, to be reserved unto judgment**" (II Pet. 2:4), certainly He will not spare sinful men that hate to be reformed, and continue in the voluptuous course of sin to the last. They who now sleep out all denunciations of the law, will find at last, they have



tangle with a powerful, inexorable God: **“Because I have called, and you refused, I have stretched out my hand, and no man regarded. But you have set at naught all my counsel, and would have none of my reproof: I also will laugh at your calamity, and mock when your fear comes: When your fear comes as desolation, and your destruction comes as a whirlwind; when distress and anguish come upon you. Then shall they call upon me, but I will not answer; they shall seek me early, but they shall not find me. For that they hated knowledge, and did not choose the fear of the Lord”** (Proverbs 1:24-29). This dreadful threatening is pointed against foolish sinners who abuse prosperity: When those who shut their eyes against danger, shall be constrained to open them, and see the fearful face of death attended with judgment, and judgment with an eternal hell: when diseases in the body, and anguish in the soul, shall assail them at once, like two clouds that by collision break forth in thunder, and they mournfully cry for mercy, their prayers will be rejected with scorn, and their ruin be remediless.

The carnal conceit that God will graciously receive sinners when the world has left them, that when by calamitous constraint they are at last brought to confess their wickedness, and are only sorrowful for the evil consequences of it, the conceit that they shall find mercy, is atheism of as blasphemous a nature as the denial of a God. For to ascribe such a mercy to God, is inconsistent with His wisdom, holiness, justice, and truth, and is to deprive Him of His purest perfections, and in effect to ungod Him.

In the rebellions of their lives, they expressed open enmity against God; and their devotion at their death, is secret flattery in His account. For thus it is said by the Psalmist of such sinners; **“When he slew them, then they sought Him: and they returned and enquired early after God. Nevertheless, they did flatter Him with their mouth, and lied to Him with their tongues. For their heart was not right with Him, and they were not steadfast in His covenant”** (Psalms 78:34, 36, 37).

It is true, God is rich in mercy, and most willing to pardon returning sinners, when their contrition is sincere, and when they are truly sorrowful that sin has made them unholy as well as unhappy, that they have abused the mercies of God, our gracious Creator and Preserver, compassionate Redeemer, and blessed Comforter, as well as provoked His anger. But those who defer their repenting while God defers punishing, and like the unjust steward, never think of making provision for their souls until they are cited to give an account of their unrighteous and ungrateful abuse of his blessings; those who renounce their sins when unable to commit them, and resolve to live well when they can live well when they can live no longer, have great reason to suspect their own hearts, and to be fearful of their future state. If a minister be called to assist such in their dying hours, there is infinite reason he should be cautious of assuring them of pardon and salvation, lest natural sorrow be mistaken for godly sorrow, and repentance declared by them, would be retracted upon new temptations: it is safe to imitate a discreet physician, that is unwilling to declare what he fears will be the issue of the disease, but modestly insinuates the danger to those that are about the sick person: **“The good God can do all things, He can revive the almost spent and expiring, O pray for him.”** It is

advice given by a skillful herbalist, that particular care is necessary in planting the seed of the Carduus, for if they are not set upright, they degenerate and produce a wild herb. The Gospel is compared to seed, and if the conditional promises of pardon and salvation are not received in the heart aright, if the comfort of them be not applied according to the qualifications that are requisite to give us an interest in them, they produce a vain presumption, a false hope, a delusive peace, instead of an unfeigned faith, a purifying hope, a solid peace. God declares it with the most sacred solemnity, **“As I live, says the Lord God, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked”** (Ezek. 33:11); if the carnal heart (like the devil who abused scripture, by leaving out part of it) shall not consider what follows, but that the wicked turn from his way and live, but shall harden and fortify itself in sin, with hopes of impunity, God will rejoice in their just destruction. He tells us that a converted sinner shall be forgiven, but that conversion must be uniform and lasting; **“If the wicked turn from all his sins that he has committed, and keep all my statutes, and do that which is lawful and right, he shall surely live and not die”** (Ezekiel 18:21).

3. The heaviness of the destruction will be according to the aggravation of their sin, who abuse prosperity.

A. It is a sin most contrary to the acknowledged duty of man, and unbecoming the reasonable nature. It is a universal concession that springs from the purest light of reason, that we **“should return good for good”** (Matthew 5:46). The heathens even agree in it. To be defective in observance, and thankful respects, to a benefactor is unnatural, but to requite evil for good is so direct a violation of the ingenuous principles of humanity, that one is prodigiously wicked in doing it: He ceases to be a man, and becomes a devil. Now this black guilt cleaves to those who abuse prosperity. The blessings of God are strong and sweet obligations to love Him, yet their perverse hearts are thereby alienated from Him. His mercies engage and enable them to serve and glorify Him, but are used to gratify their lusts, and to make them more capable and presumptuous to offend Him. Prosperity makes them luxurious and secure; riches make them sin at a higher rate; the patient providence of God, that waits for their repentance (such is their desperate corruption) fortifies them in their rebellion against Him. This was the reason of that stinging reproach of Moses to Israel, **“Do you thus requite the Lord, O foolish people and unwise?”** (Deut. 32:6).

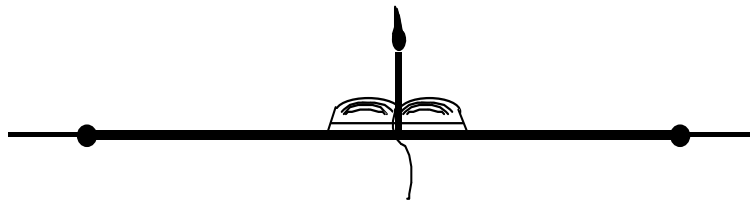
B. The abuse of prosperity is most injurious and provoking to God. To sin against His law, is an high affront to His majesty; but to sin against His love and benefits is more contumelious to Him. The apostle calls it, a **“despising of God’s goodness”** (Romans 2). What is more contumelious than to employ His benefits for the pleasing of our dishonorable vile affections? As the gift of a friend is slighted that is put to a base use; or as one that will not be reconciled by the presents of a friend, despises his gifts: Thus when the favors of God do not melt the heart into kindly re-ments, and endear Him to us, they are despised.

If a favorite, who was raised by a prince to highest honor and trust, should betray his magazines, both arms and treasures to his enemy, could

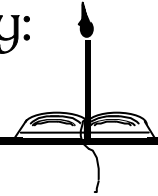
there be a fouler wickedness? And of this heinous nature is their wickedness, who abuse the mercies of God in the service of sin, and implicitly betray them into the devil's hands, who maliciously wars against God. What a contumelious indignity heightened with the basest ingratitude was Jeroboam guilty of, who changed the glory of the incorruptible God, into an image like a corruptible beast. God advanced him to the throne, and he depressed the deity to the rank of stupid calves. What a hateful abuse of his bounty was it, that the Israelites turned the jewels of gold wherewith he enriched them by the Egyptians, into a detestable idol: Of such wickedness are men deeply guilty, when the precious blessings that God bestows upon them, are made the idols of their heads and hearts, and rob Him of the honor and love that is communicably due to Him.

What can more provoke the jealous God? Mercy is His dearest glory, in which He peculiarly delights; it is to stab Him to the heart.

From hence we may justly infer, the punishment of such sinners will be most heavy, in exact proportion to their most odious ingratitude. Damnation is the recompense of every impenitent sinner, and is the most fearful effect of God's wrath. Temporal judgment are **"but the smoke of his anger"** (see Deut. 29:20), the flaming coals are in hell. But there are degrees of torment in hell, according to the number and quality of men's sins. Those who despise the goodness of God, treasure up wrath against the day of wrath. As they continually abuse His bounty and patience, they increase His vengeance, which will be as terrible as His patience was admirable. The judgment of Babylon was a strict proportion to her luxury: **"How much she has glorified herself, and live deliciously, so much torment and sorrow give her"** (Revelation 18:7). Justice will exact all the arrears of abused mercies: The lovers of this world shall pass from their good things, to the flames that live by the breath of God's revenging wrath. Doleful exchange! An hour's feeling of that fire is more tormenting than an age's enjoyment of this world in all its abundance is pleasing. But though the word of God has discovered the swift and thick coming sorrows that shall seize upon the wicked, yet so foolish and obstinate are sinners in prosperity, they will not be persuaded to fly from the wrath to come! The light of reason, and illumination of faith, is too weak to make them sensible of their danger: they will not be convinced till shut up in the darkness of hell.



## New Testament Study: Matthew 23:13-24



### “Woe to You”

<sup>13</sup>“Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You shut the kingdom of heaven in men’s faces. You yourselves do not enter, nor will you let those enter who are trying to.

<sup>15</sup>“Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You travel over land and sea to win a single convert, and when he becomes one, you make him twice as much a son of hell as you are.

<sup>16</sup>“Woe to you, blind guides! You say, ‘If anyone swears by the temple, it means nothing; but if anyone swears by the gold of the temple, he is bound by his oath.’ <sup>17</sup>You blind fools! Which is greater: the gold, or the temple that makes the gold sacred? <sup>18</sup>You also say, ‘If anyone swears by the altar, it means nothing; but if anyone swears by the gift on it, he is bound by his oath.’ <sup>19</sup>You blind men! Which is greater: the gift, or the altar that makes the gift sacred? <sup>20</sup>Therefore, he who swears by the altar swears by it and by everything on it. <sup>21</sup>And he who swears by the temple swears by it and by the one who dwells in it. <sup>22</sup>And he who swears by heaven swears by God’s throne and by the one who sits on it.

<sup>23</sup>“Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You give a tenth of your spices— mint, dill and cummin. But you have neglected the more important matters of the law— justice, mercy and faithfulness. You should have practiced the latter, without neglecting the former. <sup>24</sup>You blind guides! You strain out a gnat but swallow a camel.”

Earlier in this chapter, Jesus advised His disciples on how to respond to the religious leaders of the time, the teachers of the Law and the Pharisees. He warned His disciples, “**Do not do what they do, for they do not practice what they preach**” (Matt. 23:3). Here, in these verses, Jesus speaks directly to the religious leaders, severely admonishing them. Sadly, it is this admonishment of the religious leaders which is the last address to the general public by Jesus.

Throughout His ministry on earth, Jesus was extremely patient with evil-doers, quick to extend grace to sinners. So, His harsh words here come somewhat as a surprise. “He came to bless, and loved to bless; but, if His wrath be kindled, there is surely cause for it” [Henry]. We see here

the hatred Jesus has for hypocritical religious leaders, those who lead astray people who are trying to live a godly life. Those who are in positions of leadership in the church must surely take this admonishment to heart, and redouble their efforts to present a godly example to their flock.

Jesus begins: **“Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You shut the kingdom of heaven in men’s faces. You yourselves do not enter, nor will you let those enter who are trying to”** (vs. 13). The primary purpose for ministers of God’s word is to lead people to God. The religious leaders whom Jesus was admonishing, rather than leading people to God, were **“shutting the kingdom of heaven in men’s faces.”** Jesus seems to be, here, speaking specifically of the religious leaders’s rejection of the Messiah. They rejected the Messiah, thus, they themselves **“did not enter”**, and they discouraged others from accepting Jesus as their Messiah, thus, they did not **“let those enter who were trying to.”** “These religious teachers ought to have set men in general the example of promptly and joyfully entering the Messianic kingdom, but they actually prevented others from entering” [Broadus, 469].

It is a grievous thing when religious leaders **“shut the kingdom of heaven in men’s faces.”** Sadly, this happens quite a lot, even today, when Christians focus on *condemnation* (as the Pharisees did), rather than *salvation*. There is a lot of sin in this world. There are plenty of things to *condemn*. However, the best way to get rid of sin, is to turn people to God, to get them to wash away their sins by the blood of Jesus, and to let His Spirit work in their lives.

Jesus continues: **“Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You travel over land and sea to win a single convert, and when he becomes one, you make him twice as much a son of hell as you are”** (vs. 15). It seems the religious leaders were evangelists, of sorts. However, they weren’t seeking, in their evangelism, to turn people toward belief in the truth of God’s Word. Rather, they were seeking to **“convert”** them to their own cause. “They did this from no desire to benefit men’s souls in the least, or to bring them to God; they only did it to swell the ranks of their sect, and to increase the number of their adherents, and their own importance” [Ryle, 303]. “Their converts retained the essential faults of the heathen, and took on the faults of the Pharisees” [Broadus, 470]. Evangelism is only a good thing if the purpose of the evangelism is to lead people to God’s truth. There are many evangelists in the world, who lead people away from God’s truth. They will, like the Pharisees, receive a **“woe to you”** from Christ on judgment day.

Jesus continues: **“Woe to you, blind guides! You say, ‘If anyone swears by the temple, it means nothing; but if anyone swears by the gold of the temple, he is bound by his oath.’ You blind fools! Which is greater: the gold, or the temple that makes the gold sacred? You also say, ‘If anyone swears by the altar, it means nothing; but if anyone swears by the gift on it, he is bound by his oath.’ You blind men! Which is greater: the gift, or the altar that makes the gift sacred? Therefore, he who swears by the altar swears by it and by everything on it. And he who swears by the temple swears by it and by the one who dwells in it. And he who swears by heaven swears by God’s throne and by the one who sits on it”** (vss. 16–21). The religious leaders, who were supposed to be teachers of the Law, lacked respect for the Law of God, as seen in these verses. They made a mockery of the laws that said that men were bound by oaths. They allowed oaths to be bro-

ken, under certain semantic conditions. “Our Lord condemns the subtle distinctions they made as to the sanctity of oaths, distinctions invented only to promote their own avaricious purposes” [JFB, V-109]. “It is preposterous to think that God is going to be concerned with the precise form of words a man uses in swearing an oath, so that He would take seriously an oath sworn by the gold of the temple, but would not regard an oath by the temple itself in the same way. To maintain such a distinction is both foolish and blind. Anyone who does so takes insufficient notice of the fact that God demands complete truthfulness in His people so that any pledge is to be discharged. We cannot escape any legitimate pledge by quibbling about the form of words in which the pledge is expressed, oath or not” [Morris, 581]. The purpose of oaths was to give assurance to the receiver of the promise that one’s word would be kept. The purpose of oaths was not to allow loopholes to be devised to make it easier to break promises. Any such use of God’s Law is absurd and blasphemous. It shows a lack of respect for God’s truthfulness. Do they think they are fooling God with evasive semantics?

Jesus continues: **“Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You give a tenth of your spices—mint, dill, and cummin. But you have neglected the more important matters of the law—justice, mercy and faithfulness. You should have practiced the latter, without neglecting the former. You blind guides! You strain out a gnat but swallow a camel”** (vss. 23–24). Here Jesus chides the religious leaders for making a show of holiness, while **“neglecting the more important matters of the law.”** They made a show of their holiness by publicly tithing their smallest possessions, even the spices they received. It was easy to (supposedly) prove their holiness in this way. In their eyes, this was *objective*, measurable proof that they obeyed God’s law. But God wants obedience, not only in the *objective* matters of the law (such as tithing), but also in the *subjective* matters of the law, such as justice, mercy and faithfulness. “To be just to the priests in their tithe, and yet to cheat and defraud everybody else, is but to mock God, and deceive ourselves” [Henry]. To be seen as a just man, or as a merciful man, or as a faithful man, requires not just one objective act of obedience to God, but a life-long way of life, lived in obedience to God. This is much more difficult, and in these **“more important matters of the law”**, the religious leaders failed.

Many people mistakenly perceive that God wants material gifts, and that material gifts will cover a multitude of sins. This faulty perception is the result, in many cases, of the over-emphasis given by many ministers of God’s Word to the importance of giving material gifts to the church. Many ministers, in effect, say “Give money to our church, and God will be pleased with you.” Such a message is un-Biblical, and misrepresents God as a money-grubbing mercenary. Through the prophet Micah, in the Old Testament, God expressed His desire that people live a holy life, over His desire that they give gifts to the church: **“With what shall I come before the Lord and bow down before the exalted God? Shall I come before Him with burnt offerings with calves a year old? Will the Lord be pleased with thousands of rams, with ten thousand rivers of oil? Shall I offer my firstborn for my transgression, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul? He has showed you, O man, what is good. And what does the Lord require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with you God”** (Micah 6:6–8).



## A Topical Study: On Prayer

*[As we continue our series on prayer, here we begin a study in which Richard Baxter answers questions about prayer.]*

### Some Questions About Prayer Answered, pt. 1 by Richard Baxter (1615-1691)

The rest of the general directions about prayer, I think will be best contrived into the resolving of these following doubts:

*Question 1.* Is the Lord's prayer a directory only, or a form of words to be used by us in prayer?

*Answer.* 1. It is principally the rule to guide our inward desires, and outward expressions of them; both for the matter, what we must desire, and for the order which we must desire first and most. 2. But this rule is given in a form of words, most apt to express the said matter and order. 3. And this form may fitly be used in due season by all, and more necessarily by some. 4. But it was never intended to be the only words which we must use, no more than the creed is the only words that we must use to express the doctrine of faith, or the Decalogue the only words to express our duty by.

*Question 2.* What need is there of any other words of prayer, if the Lord's prayer be perfect?

*Answer.* Because it is only a perfect summary, containing but the general heads: and it is needful to be more particular in our desires; for universals exist in particulars; and he that only nameth the general, and then another and another general, doth remember but few of the particulars. He that shall say, "I have sinned, and broken all thy commandments," doth generally confess every sin; but it is not true repentance, if it be not particular, for this, and that, and the other sin; at least as to the greater which may be remembered. He that shall say, "I believe all the word of God, or I believe in God the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost," may know little what is in the word of God, or what these generals signify, and therefore our faith must be more particular. So must desires after grace be particular also: otherwise it were enough to ask for mercy in the general. If you say, that God knows what those general words signify, though we do not, I answer, this is a silly argument for rote prayers. God knows our desires without any expressions or prayers at all, and He knows our wants without our desires. However, it does not follow that prayers or desires are unnecessary. The exercise of our own repentance and desire does make us persons fit to receive forgiveness, and the grace desired, while the impenitent, and those that desire it not, are unfit. And it is no true repentance, when you say, "I am sorry that I have sinned," but you know not, or remember not, wherein you have sinned, nor what your sin is. And so it is no true desire that reaches not to the particular, necessary graces, which we must desire.

*Question 3.* Is it lawful to pray in a set form of words?

*Answer.* Nothing but very great ignorance can make you really doubt of it. Hath God anywhere forbid it? You will say, that it is enough that He hath not commanded it. I answer, that in general He hath commanded it to all whose edification it tends to, when He commandeth you that all be done to edification; but He hath given no particular command, nor prohibition. No more has He commanded you to pray in English, French, or Latin; nor to sing psalms in this tune or that, nor after this or that version or translation; nor to preach in this method particularly or that; nor always to preach upon a text; nor to use written notes; nor to compose a form of words, and learn them, and preach them after they are composed, with a hundred such like, which are undoubtedly lawful; yea, and needful to some, though not to others. If you make up all your prayer of Scripture sentences, this is to pray in a form of prescribed words, and yet as lawful and fit as any of your own. The psalms are most of them forms of prayer or praise, which the Spirit of God indited for the use of the church, and of particular persons. It would be easy to fill many pages with larger reasonings, and answers to all the fallacious objections that are brought against this; but I will not so far weary the reader and myself.

*Question 4.* But are those forms lawful which are prescribed by others, and not by God?

*Answer.* Yea; or else it would be unlawful for a child or scholar to use a form prescribed by his parents or master. And to think that a thing lawful doth presently become unlawful, because a parent, master, pastor, or prince does prescribe it or command it, is a conceit that I will not wrong my reader so far as to suppose him guilty of. Indeed, if a usurper, that hath no authority over us in such matters, do prescribe it, we are not bound to formal obedience, that is, to do it therefore because he commands it; but yet I may be bound to it on some other accounts; and though his command does not bind me, yet it makes not the thing itself unlawful.

*Question 5.* But is it lawful to pray extempore without a premeditated form of words?

*Answer.* No Christian of competent understanding doubteth of it. We must premeditate on our wants, and sins, and the graces and mercies we desire, and the God we speak to; and we must be able to express these things without any loathsome and unfit expressions. But whether the words are fore-contrived or not, is a thing that God hath no more bound you to by any law, than whether the speaker or hearers shall use sermon-notes, or whether your Bibles shall be written or in print.

*Question 6.* If both ways be lawful, which is better?

*Answer.* If you are to join with others in the church, that is better to you which the pastor then useth: for it is his office and not yours to word the prayers which he puts up to God. And if he chooses a form (whether it be as most agreeable to his parts, or to his people, or for concord with other churches, or for obedience to governors, or to avoid some greater inconvenience) you must join with him, or not join there at all. But if it be in private, where you are the speaker yourself, you must take that way that is most to your own edification (and to others, if you have auditors joining with you). One man is so unused to prayer, (being ignorantly bred), or of such unready memory or expression, that he cannot remember the tenth part so much of his particular wants, without the help of a form, as with it; nor can he express it so affectingly for himself or others; nay, perhaps not in tolerable words. And a form to such a man may be a



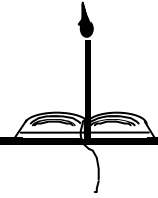
duty; as to a dim-sighted man to read by spectacles, or to an unready preacher to use prepared words and notes. And another man may have need of no such helps; nay, when he is habituated in the understanding and feeling of his sins and wants, and hath a tongue that is used to express his mind even in these matters, with readiness and facility, it will greatly hinder the fervor of such a man's affections, to tie himself to premeditated words: to say the contrary, is to speak against the common sense and experience of such speakers and their hearers. And let them that yet deride this as uncertain and inconsiderate praying, but mark themselves, whether they cannot if they be hungry beg for bread, or ask help of their physician, or lawyer, or landlord, or any other, as well without a learned or studied form as with it? Turning the thoughts too solicitously from the matter to the words, doth not only mortify the prayers of many, and turn them into a dead form, but also makes them more dry and barren even as to the words themselves. The heavy charge, and bitter, scornful words which have been too common in this age, against praying without a set form by some, and against praying with a book or form by others, is so dishonorable a symptom or diagnostic of the church's sickness, as must needs be matter of shame and sorrow to the sounder, understanding part. For it cannot be denied, but it proves men's understandings and charity to be both exceedingly low.

*Question 7.* Must we always pray according to the method of the Lord's prayer, and is it a sin to do otherwise?

*Answer.* 1. The Lord's prayer is first a rule for your desires; and if your desires follow not that method, it is a sin. If you do not begin in your desires with God, as your ultimate end, and if you first desire not His glory, and then the flourishing of His kingdom, and then the obeying of His laws, and herein the public welfare of the world, before and above your particular benefit, it is a sin. And it is a sin if you desire not your daily bread, (or necessary support of nature), as a lower mercy in order to your higher spiritual mercies; and if you desire not pardon of sin, as a means to your future sanctity, duty, and felicity; and if you desire not these, as a means to the glory of God, and take not His praises as the highest part of your prayers. But for the expressing of these desires, particular occasions may warrant you oft times to begin in another order: as when you pray for the sick, or pray for directions, or a blessing before a sermon or some particular work, you may begin and end with the subject that is before you, as the prayers of holy men in all ages have done. 2. You must distinguish also, as between desires and expressions, so between a universal and a particular prayer. The one contains all the parts of prayer, and the other is but about some one subject or part, or but some few; this last being but one or few, particular petitions cannot possibly be uttered in the method of a universal prayer which hath all the parts. There is no one petition in the Lord's prayer, but may be made a prayer itself; and then it cannot have the other petitions as parts. 3. And you must distinguish between the even and ordinary case of a Christian, and His extraordinary case, when some special reason, affection, or accident calls him to look most to some one particular. In his even and ordinary case, every universal prayer should be expressed in the method of the Lord's prayer; but in cases of special reason and inducement, it may be otherwise.

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## A Study in Wisdom: Job 1:1 (pt. 4)



*[Here we continue a reprint of a small portion of Joseph Caryl's study in Job. Mr. Caryl wrote twelve volumes on the book of Job. His study is a great example of how deep one can dig into the truths of the Bible.]*

### Job 1:2 – Job's Family, by Joseph Caryl

**<sup>2</sup>There were born unto him seven sons and three daughters.**

This verse contains the first part of Job's outward happiness; the blessings of children. Concerning whom we have three things offered. 1. Their number ten. 2. The distinction of sexes (sons and daughters). 3. Their mutual love and concord.

There is little in the words that needs explication, therefore where the Scripture is plain and clear, I will not spend time.

*There were born unto him.*

His children were not born against him, but born unto him, given as comforts and blessings to him.

*Seven sons and three daughters.* The number seven and the number three, are numbers of perfection. Some trouble themselves much about them, but I will not stay upon numbers.

Here observe,

1. *Children are blessings of the Lord.*

They are put here as a part of his inheritance. "**Children are an heritage of the Lord, and the fruit of the womb is his reward**" (Psalm 127:13). They are special blessing. Children (as it is observed) are a resemblance of our immortality, because a man revives again, lives anew (as it were) in every child: he is born again (in a civil sense) when others are born unto him. There be some who account their children but bills of charges, but God puts them upon the account of our mercies; how holily and piously speaks Jacob concerning his children. "**These are the children which God has graciously given thy servant**" (Genesis 33:5).

2. Observe this, *Children as they are blessings and great blessings, so they are greater blessings than any outward thing else whatsoever.*

When a description is made of goods, the best is put first. First, his spiritual blessings are set down, then comes his outward; now children are put in the very next degree to his graces. What our Savior Christ says of a man's soul, may be said of children; "**What shall a man give in exchange**

**for his soul?”** (Matt 16:26). It is true, which is spoken there of a man’s own soul, that it is more to himself than the world, but it is a truth here too, if one have a soul given him (and to have a child is to have a soul bestowed upon us) for the present it is more than to have the whole world bestowed on him. A whole world of riches is not so good, not such goods, as one child: therefore children are put in the first place, as his choosiest and chiefest outward blessings.

Then from the number of his children, he had many children, he had 7 sons and 3 daughters. Observe,

3. *To have many children is a great blessing, and the more children the greater the blessing.*

Some think themselves blessed, if they may have one or two children; one to inherit their estates, one or two to delight themselves in, to play with, or to bear their name; but if they come to a number, to a great number, then they think themselves exceedingly burdened, then they are troubles. When God casts up the estate of a blessed man in outward things, He says not only that he has a child, that he is not barren, but that he has many children, that he has his quiver full of such arrows, as the expression is, and that is made the blessedness of a man there, **“Happy is the man that has his quiver full of them”** (Ps. 127:5), that has many such arrows, such are children of the youth. There are some rich and covetous men, that are in this point beyond others rich in folly. You shall hear them pride themselves, that they have no children, or but few; this they conceive sets them off in the opinion of the world for the richer men, whereas one child is more riches than all the things that are in the world. And we know, it is an ordinary thing (though indeed it is a very sinful thing) to say, it is true such an one is a rich man, he has a fair estate, but he has a great charge, a great many children, as if that did take off from his riches, or make him less happy: as if he were the poorer, because he has a larger share of that ancient first blessing upon man, **“Be fruitful and multiply and replenish the Earth”** (Gen. 1:28).

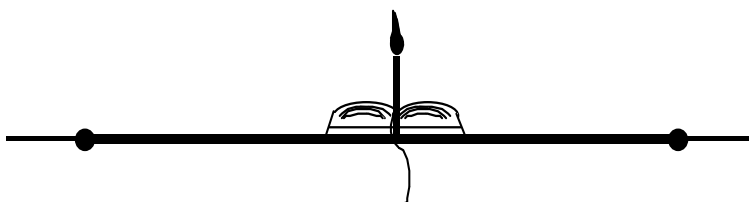
4. To have many sons and daughters too, is yet a more complete blessing.

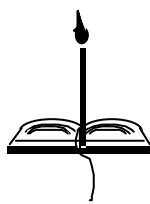
For by daughters the family is increased, and other families are joined and knit and united to that family. And to have sons and daughters both, is the perfection of that natural blessing; because man was so made that first, he was made male and female. As it is with the soul and the body, though the soul be more excellent than the body, yet the soul alone is not so perfect, as when soul and body are together: because though the body be not so strong in constitution and noble in condition as the soul, yet body and soul in creation were joined together, therefore their greatest perfection consists in their union. So likewise it is in a family, the fullness and completeness of the blessing is in the union of both. Job had many sons and daughters likewise, this made the blessing more complete.

And then lastly observe this, *Job had many children in the family are in*

*themselves no impediments, either of piety towards God or justice toward man.*

As soon as ever Job was described in all his perfections, it is added he had many sons and many daughters, though he had so many to look to and provide for, yet he omitted neither duty towards God, nor duty towards man. There are many who think it some excuse, if not excuse enough for their neglect, for their slighting holy duties, or slightness in the holy duties of hearing, praying, and the like; oh, they have a great many children, and they must rise early and they must work late, they can spare no time or but little for the public or private or secret worship of God; especially for anything that is extraordinary: so that these cares steal away, not only those times that might be bestowed in an extraordinary manner upon their souls, but even the ordinary times are stolen away by them also. Further, some think themselves by this in part excused for their injustice toward men, they have a great family, and if they deal somewhat harshly, and stick as close as they can in business, they may be borne with for they have a great many children; and they must look to provide for them, they else were worse than infidels, and hence they take liberty to do what honest infidels were ashamed of. Job, you see, was upright, though he had so many sons and daughters to provide for. It is ill with those whose gain for their children is any loss to their souls; but woe, when any to gain for their children is any loss to their souls: doing like those in Nahum 2:12, **“The lion did tear in pieces enough for his whelps, and strangled for his lionesses, and filled his holes with prey, and his dens with rapine.”** By the lion there is meant those oppressors, that lived in Ninevah, and by their whelps are meant their children, and by lionesses their wives; they had wives and children, and they must have means and estates for them. Job may say had whelps and a lioness, wife and children, yet he does not tear for them. Nay though he had so many to provide for, yet he rather give out to others. What hungry belly was not filled with his meat? And what naked back was not clothed with his wool? He did not say: “I have children to feed and to clothe, and therefore you can have nothing.” You see though he had many children and a great charge, yet how complete he was in his duty to God and in his duty to man, he failed not either in the duties of worship and holiness, not in the duties of justice and uprightness.



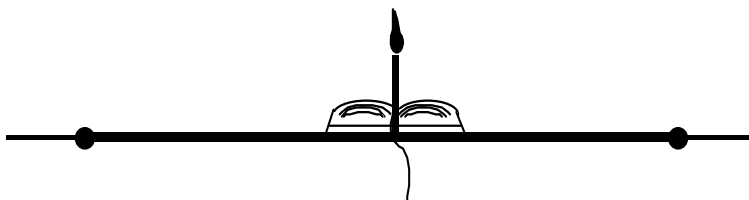


## A Meditation: The Spiritual Chemist

### **A Meditation Upon a Philosopher's Stone by William Spurstowe (ca. 1666)**

The Title may happily as much affect such who make gold their god, as the sight of the star did the wise men, hoping that it will be both a light and guide to the discovery of that rare and matchless secret, of turning the more base and inferior metals into the more noble; iron into silver, and brass into gold, and so enrich them with an artificial riches. But I can scarce resolve myself whether the Philosopher's Stone, which is thus framed for wonders, be not rather a speculation than an absolute reality, or an attempt assayed by many, rather than an achievement attained by few or any. How many have melted down ample revenues in their crucibles, and while they have, with much labor, sought the sublimation of metals, have sunk themselves into the deepest beggary? And how have others consumed their time, if not wasted their estates in a fruitless pursuit of it? And yet have seen no other change than what age and care hath made in themselves, by turning their golden hair into silver hair; or at the best have gleaned up some few experiments only, which have not compensated their cost and travel. But, what, if any man, after long search and study, can like Archimedes cry out joyfully, that he hath found? Yea, what if every man, who have busied his thoughts, and employed his time in diving into this mystery, should be able to effect such a change, and to multiply his treasure as the sand? Yet, how worthless and inconsiderable would such productions of his Philosopher's Stone be found, if compared with noble and transcendent effects of the Divine, or Theological Stone, which Christ promises in the Book of Revelation to him that overcomes: whole worth, as it is far greater, so the way to obtain it is more facile and certain, it being not a work of labor, but a gift of grace. This Stone is of such power and energy, that whosoever is possessed of it, can have nothing befall him, which it changeth and turneth not

to his good: it turneth all temporal losses into spiritual advantages; all crosses into blessings; all afflictions into comforts: it dignifies reproach and ignominy; it changeth the hardship of a prison into the delights of a palace; it is an heavenly Anodyne against all pains, and makes the soul to possess itself in patience in every condition. It is a Panacea, a universal salve for every sore, to all accidents that can befall a man; it is as the seal to the wax, putting upon them a new stamp and figure, and making them to be what they were not before, and what they never could have been without it. Such it is that he who hath it, hath all good: and he that wants it (whatever else he seems to possess) hath little less than nothing. Who then can without mourning as well as wondering, think at the prodigious folly of those men, who labor in a continual fire to effect the Stone of the Transmutation of Metals, and yet deem this Divine Stone scarce worth the begging of God in a prayer? Is this wisdom to roil in the refining of clay, and to be able to make a dull piece of earth to shine, and then to value our happiness by it? Is this wisdom to set a low rate upon what God hath promised to give, and highly to esteem what we can do? O Lord, if this be the world's wisdom, let me become a fool: I had rather have this Divine Stone of Thy promise, than all the treasures that nature and art can yield. Let the mountains be turned into gold, the rocks into diamonds, the sands into pearls, yet this Stone with the New Name written in it, is to me more desirable than all, as being a sure pledge of life and happiness in heaven.



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### The Blessings of God

"Where shall we begin, to survey this vast load of mercies? Were it no more, but that He hath given us a world to live in, a life to enjoy, air to breathe in, earth to tread on, fire to warm us, water to cool and cleanse us, clothes to cover us, food to nourish us, sleep to refresh us, houses to shelter us, variety of creatures to serve and delight us; here were a just load. But now, if we yet add to these, civility of breeding, dearness of friends, competency of estate, degrees of honor, honesty or dignity of vocation, favor of princes, success in employments, domestic comforts, outward peace, good reputation, preservation from dangers, rescue from evils; the load is well mended. If yet, ye shall come closer, and add due proportion of body, integrity of parts, perfection of senses, strength of nature, mediocrity of health, sufficiency of appetite, vigor of digestion, wholesome temper of seasons, freedom from cares; this course must needs heighten it yet more. If still ye shall add to these, the order, and power, and exercise of our inward faculties, enriched with wisdom, art learning, experience, expressed by a handsome elocution, and shall now lay all these together that concern estate, body, mind; how can the axle tree of the soul but crack under the load of these favors? But, if from what God hath done for us as men, we look to what He hath done for us as Christians; that He hath enlightened us by His Spirit, fed us by His word and sacraments, clothed us with His merits, brought us with His blood, becoming vile to make us glorious, a curse, to invest us with blessedness; in a word, that He hath given Himself to us, His Son for us; Oh the height, and depth, and breadth of the rich mercies of our God!"

-- Joseph Hall (1574-1656)

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