

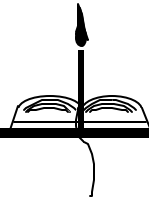
Scripture Studies

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

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May God bless you as you study His Word.



Old Testament Study: Exodus 4:18-23

Moses Returns to Egypt

^{4:18}Then Moses went back to Jethro his father-in-law and said to him, "Let me go back to my own people in Egypt to see if any of them are still alive."

Jethro said, "Go, and I wish you well."

¹⁹Now the LORD had said to Moses in Midian, "Go back to Egypt, for all the men who wanted to kill you are dead." ²⁰So Moses took his wife and sons, put them on a donkey and started back to Egypt. And he took the staff of God in his hand.

²¹The LORD said to Moses, "When you return to Egypt, see that you perform before Pharaoh all the wonders I have given you the power to do. But I will harden his heart so that he will not let the people go. ²²Then say to Pharaoh, 'This is what the LORD says: Israel is my firstborn son, ²³and I told you, "Let my son go, so he may worship me." But you refused to let him go; so I will kill your firstborn son.'

²⁴At a lodging place on the way, the LORD met Moses and was about to kill him. ²⁵But Zipporah took a flint knife, cut off her son's foreskin and touched Moses' feet with it. "Surely you are a bridegroom of blood to me," she said. ²⁶So the LORD let him alone. (At that time she said "bridegroom of blood," referring to circumcision.)

²⁷The LORD said to Aaron, "Go into the desert to meet Moses." So he met Moses at the mountain of God and kissed him. ²⁸Then Moses told Aaron everything the LORD had sent him to say, and also about all the miraculous signs he had commanded him to perform.

²⁹Moses and Aaron brought together all the elders of the Israelites, ³⁰and Aaron told them everything the LORD had said to Moses. He also performed the signs before the people, ³¹and they believed. And when they heard that the LORD was concerned about them and had seen their misery, they bowed down and worshiped.

In the previous sections, God called Moses to service. Moses resisted this call to service by giving God as many reasons as he could think of as to

why he was not suited to serve God. God answered every objection so now, in this chapter, we first see Moses' preparation to return to Egypt to lead the children of God out of bondage: **"Then Moses went back to Jethro his father-in-law and said to him, 'Let me go back to my own people in Egypt to see if any of them are still alive'"** (vs. 18).

Even those who are called to serve God should show common courtesy to their fellow men. Moses showed consideration for Jethro by getting his permission to leave. "This act of Moses was very commendable. Jethro had taken him in while a fugitive from Egypt had given him his daughter to wife, and had provided him with a home for forty years. Moreover, Moses had charge of his flock (see 3:1). It would, then, have been grossly discourteous and the height of ingratitude had Moses gone down to Egypt without first notifying his father-in-law... This request of Moses manifested his thoughtfulness of others, and his appreciation of favors received. Let writer and reader take this to heart. Spiritual activities never absolve us from the common amenities and responsibilities of life. No believer who is not a gentleman or a lady is a true Christian in the full sense of the word. To be a Christian is to practice Christliness, and Christ ever thought of others" [Pink, 39].

Interestingly, Moses did not mention to Jethro the direct call of God. Did he omit it out of modesty? Or was he afraid the incredulity of it would lead Jethro to conclude that Moses made it all up? We are not told why Moses did not mention it, and Moses was never chastised by God for not revealing to Jethro the call of God upon his life. It could well be that Moses showed godly wisdom in the way he handled the situation, that to mention the call of God would have complicated matters, thus endangering his mission. As it was, Moses obtained permission from Jethro to leave: **"Jethro said, 'Go, and I wish you well'"** (vs. 18).

As Moses was preparing to leave, God spoke to Moses, reiterating his mission: **"Now the Lord had said to Moses in Midian, 'Go back to Egypt, for all the men who wanted to kill you are dead.' So Moses took his wife and sons, put them on a donkey and started back to Egypt. And he took the staff of God in his hand"** (vss. 19-20). In addition to telling him to go back to Egypt, God reassured Moses that **"all the men who wanted to kill"** him were dead. God must have known that it was a fear of Moses' that his life was in danger from those who knew him. In fact, this may have been a reason that Moses offered up so many excuses not to go back to Egypt. "Perhaps some secret fear of falling into their hands was at the bottom of Moses's backwardness to go to Egypt, though he was not willing to own it, but pleaded unworthiness, insufficiency, want of elocution, etc." [Henry]. Whatever the case, God in His grace assured Moses that he would be safe from his former enemies.

Even after Moses stepped out in faith, God continued to speak to him of his mission: **"The Lord said to Moses, 'When you return to Egypt, see that you perform before Pharaoh all the wonders I have given**

you the power to do. But I will harden his heart so that he will not let the people go. Then say to Pharaoh, “This is what the Lord says: Israel is my firstborn son, and I told you, ‘Let my son go, so he may worship me.’ But you refused to let him go; so I will kill your firstborn son”” (vss. 21–23). God laid it all out for Moses to know ahead of time. God even told Moses of the resistance he would face from Pharaoh, as Pharaoh’s heart was hardened. God is and always has been forthright with his servants, frankly letting them know that, even though they are servants of the Most High God, they will face opposition and adversity.

Before Moses was to fully enter into God’s service, there was a bit of unfinished business God had to deal with: **“At a lodging place on the way, the Lord met Moses and was about to kill him. But Zipporah took a flint knife, cut off her son’s foreskin and touched Moses’ feet with it. ‘Surely you are a bridegroom of blood to me,’ she said. So the Lord let him alone. (At that time she said ‘bridegroom of blood,’ referring to circumcision.)”** (vss. 24–26). This passage seems a bit obscure, but with a bit of study, and a dose of inference, we can figure out what’s going on. It seems that Moses had neglected to circumcise a son of his, apparently because Zipporah objected to the rite. Perhaps Moses had performed the rite on the first son, and the witnessing of it caused Zipporah to object to circumcising the second son.

Circumcision was commanded for all male descendants of Abraham, as God told Abraham: **“My covenant in your flesh is to be an everlasting covenant. Any uncircumcised male, who has not been circumcised in the flesh, will be cut off from his people; he has broken my covenant”** (Gen. 17:13–14). Thus, by not circumcising his son, Moses was in flagrant disobedience of a commandment of God. This disobedience was all the more serious because circumcision was the sign and seal of the covenant between God and His people; and then, Moses was to be the leader of God’s people, serving God as the covenant promises made to Abraham were fulfilled, so such a lapse in obedience could not be tolerated by God, in Moses’ case.

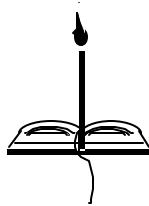
And so, God threatened Moses with death. We are not told how God made this threat, whether through the voice of the Angel of the Lord, or through the voice of conscience, but it was clear to both Moses and Zipporah that the threat was made. This threat showed Moses the “earnestness God demanded the keeping of His commandments” [K&D]. God was to show no favoritism to Moses, even though Moses was to be the leader of God’s people. On the contrary, God demanded a stricter obedience from Moses, that Moses might set an example for the people. In the same way, God demands of all His servants a strict obedience. We get no special favors where the Law of God is concerned, just because we serve Him. “Before God suffered Moses to go and minister to Israel, He first required him to set his own house in order. Not until this had been

attended to was Moses qualified for his mission... As a general rule God refuses to use in public ministry one who is lax and lawless in his own home" [Pink, 40].

Moreover, though it seems it was Zipporah who convinced Moses not to circumcise the boy, "nevertheless, it was Moses, the head of the house (the one God ever holds primarily responsible for the training and conduct of the children), and not Zipporah, whom the Lord sought to kill. This points a most solemn warning to Christian fathers today. A man may be united to a woman who opposes him at every step as he desires to maintain a scriptural discipline in his home, but this does not absolve him from doing his duty" [Pink, 40].

As Moses was journeying towards Egypt, God was at work in Egypt, preparing for Moses' return: **"The Lord said to Aaron, 'Go into the desert to meet Moses.' So he met Moses at the mountain of God and kissed him. Then Moses told Aaron everything the Lord had sent him to say, and also about the miraculous signs he had commanded him to perform"** (vss. 27-28). "This is another example of how when God works, He works at both ends of the line: Moses was advancing toward Egypt, Aaron is sent to meet him" [Pink, 40]. God in His wisdom and grace sent Aaron to meet Moses. This must surely have made it easier for Moses, a stranger to the Hebrews after having been gone for forty years, to step out in front and lead them. "When it comes to serving the Lord, two are better than one (see Eccl. 4:9)" [Wiersbe, 22].

When Moses reached Egypt: **"Moses and Aaron brought together all the elders of the Israelites, and Aaron told them everything the Lord had said to Moses. He also performed the signs before the people, and they believed. And when they heard that the Lord was concerned about them and had seen their misery, they bowed down and worshiped"** (vss. 29-31). When asked to serve the Lord, Moses expressed to God his fear of the people's reaction to him: **"What if they do not believe me or listen to me and say, 'The Lord did not appear to you?'"** (Ex. 4:1). God, in His faithfulness, set up the circumstances and prepared the hearts of the people so that they did believe Moses. So, the fears of Moses were allayed right away. And not only did they believe Moses, but his presence and the mission he was sent on by God caused the people to **"bow down and worship"** the Lord. What better reward for a servant of God is there than to be able to bring people into reverence and worship of God?



A Classic Study: Patience in Affliction

A Classic Study by Richard Baxter (1615–1691)

[Here, we continue a reprint of Richard Baxter's work entitled *Obedient Patience*. In each article, Mr. Baxter gives advice on how to be patient through a specific type of affliction.]—*Ed.*

When God Does Not Bless the Labors of Our Callings - I

Another case which greatly needeth patience is when God doth not bless and prosper our endeavors: when ministers study, and preach, and pray, and yet see but small fruit of their labors; few converted, reformed, or strengthened, but all their labor seemeth lost; when parents take pains with their children, and they remain still obstinate and wicked; when magistrates' endeavors are frustrated by a contentious, rebellious people; when men labor in their lawful callings, and all goeth backward, and God seemeth not to bless their labors; in sickness our physic doth not prosper; when we are falsely accused, our just defense is not believed; when we endeavor the public good, we prosper not. This maketh men fear that God forsaketh them.

These several causes should be severally considered. And the case of unprosperous ministers, I confess, is very bad. When a man from his youth is devoted to that holy work, and by many years' hard study prepared for it, and studieth for it all his life, and spends time and strength in constant labor, and after all can see small fruit; this lieth heavy, and tempteth them to doubt whether they were called of God, and whether they are not unfit for the work, or unfaithful in it. Through God's great mercy it is not my own trial: I know not that ever I labored anywhere in vain; but I have lived near far better men, who have lived to above fourscore years of age, and have said, that they know not of two souls converted by them in the parishes where they lived: some speed better upon such as came from other parishes, and some on very few at all. And alas! To see no better fruit of such employment, than barely to have a benefice to live on, and some reverence from the people, or a few good words, is a poor encouragement.

But, 1. The first thing to be done in this sad case is to search whether the fault be not in ourselves. Whether we choose such subjects to preach on as are most suitable to the hearers' state, and fittest to convince and win them: whether we study plainness and familiar words, and a close, convincing way of speech; whether by familiar conversation with them we get their love, and also find out their ignorance, error, and sin, their objections and doubts, that we may know what they need; and whether we deal with them privately and personally as well as publicly, for their instruction; whether our lives preach to them as well as our tongues, and show them that we believe what we speak; and whether we do all in the expression of unfeigned love, and do them all the good we can for their bodies, and quarrel not with them for worldly things, but lose our right rather than scandalize them, and harden them against the truth: If any of this be amiss, it must be amended; if not, then consider:

2. That to labor is our part, and to prosper is God's. Paul and Apollos can but plant and water, but it is God that must give the increase. Christ Himself both preached and wrought miracles in some places, when yet few believed on Him; yea, though the people cried Him up, it was no great number that were thoroughly converted by all His preaching and works, that being reserved for the coming down of the Holy Ghost, after His death and resurrection. And in some places few were converted by the apostles. Even among the learned philosophers at Athens, how little was their success!

3. God knoweth His chosen, and all shall come to Christ that the Father hath given Him, and none of them shall be lost: and God loveth souls and holiness better than we do. All souls are His; and Christ knoweth the price of them. And we know that all that God doth is good, and we shall see the reason of it at last.

The prophets and apostles had more unthankful requitals, than the mere loss of their labour with the greater part. They were also persecuted, scorned, and killed, by them whose salvation they desired. **"Which of the prophets have not your fathers killed and persecuted,"** saith Christ (Matt. 23). See also Isa. 53:1, etc.; John 12:37-38; Acts 17; 19:9; 28:24. Yea, to some the word is the savor of death unto death, and Christ is a stone of stumbling, and ministers are the scorn of the world, and the off-scouring of all things; and, alas!, they must be witnesses against their hearers to their condemnation, and must **"shake off the dust of their feet against them"** (Matt. 10:14).

4. If our success were according to our own desires, it would be beyond what God intendeth for men in the world: we would have every man in the world converted and saved. It is our duty to desire and endeavor it as far as we are able, for it is not God's decrees, but His com-

mands, which are our rule. **“Many widows”** (saith Christ) **“were in the days of Elisha, but it was not to many that he was sent”** (see Luke 4:25ff). We may have comfort in our just desires and endeavors.

5. God will accept and reward us, according to our faithful work, and not according to our success. A bad man may be used to save other men’s souls, when his own is lost. **“Though Israel be not gathered, yet shall I be glorious in the eyes of the Lord, and my God shall be my strength”** (Isa. 49:5). It is spoken both of the prophets and of Christ. It was to **“the lost sheep of the house of Israel,”** that Christ saith He was sent; and He is called a minister of the circumcision. And yet Israel was not gathered, when He would have gathered them as a hen doth her chickens (see Matt. 23). But they were to be utterly ruined for rejecting Him. **“Now thanks be to God, who causeth us to triumph in Christ, and maketh manifest the savour of His knowledge by us in every place. For we are unto God a sweet savor of Christ in them that are saved, and in them that perish. To the one the savor of death to death, and to the other the savor of life unto life: and who is sufficient for these things?”** (II Cor. 2:14–15). Faithful labor is never wholly lost.

6. And one soul is so precious, as is worth more than all the labor of our lives. He is a hypocrite himself, and no faithful minister of Christ, that had not rather save one soul, though he live in poverty, than have the richest bishopric, and save none. His money shall perish with him, who loveth money better than the soul of the poorest beggar.

7. There may perhaps be many more souls converted than the preacher ever heareth of. The work hath often obscure beginnings. You know not what workings may be in the secret hearts of sinners: and some are bashful, and some have not opportunity to show themselves. I have visited some aged women before death, who were not noted for any zealous profession of religion, but what they showed in the church assemblies, and I found them of solid understanding and experience; and perceived by their talk that they had been constant in all secret duties, and conscionable in all their course. And when I enquired further, I found that they had husbands that restrained them from the society of godly people, and from all open manifestation of what was in their, save what their church worship and upright living showed. And this is the case of some children and servants, who are under the restraint of bad parents and masters. We must not then conclude, that all the seed is lost, which seemeth buried, and appeareth not to us.

8. It is not lost labor which doth but restrain men from being worse. The suppression of vice, and the keeping up a profession of the truth, is worth all our labor; as also the keeping out heresies and errors; and it is

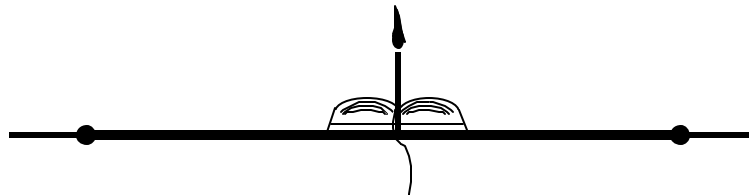
worth our labor to feed Christ's sheep, and help to confirm such as are true Christians already, and to increase the grace they have; and to comfort the sad, and resolve the doubting, and edify the body of Christ. Surely, the work which is to be done in guiding and edifying the converted, requireth as great skill at least, as that which is required to the converting of infidels and wicked men (though the change made on the learners be not so great, in regard of the *terminus a quo*; for the higher includeth the lower); and more learning is necessary to teach the higher form, than to teach the alphabet. Some are for planting, and some for watering; some went forth to make disciples of the nations, and baptize them, and some were to guide them when baptized, and teach them to observe all Christ's commands.

9. If your study and doctrine edify and save yourselves, it is an unspeakable mercy; you have had the comfort of sweet and holy studies, and the pleasant work of opening and pleading saving truth: and if all this study and preaching have but prevailed with yourselves, and conquered your own sins, and subdued your souls to the obedience of Christ, how happy are you! Yet all this is not said to make you indifferent as to your success: I further, therefore, advise you, (1.) Long for the winning and edifying of souls; for I have observed, that few prosper this way, but those that earnestly desire it.

(2.) Pray hard for them to God, and see that you neglect not your own duty. Study for eminent abilities; preach plainly, earnestly, reverently; exhort them personally; do them good charitably; hurt none; avoid scandal; live as you teach; shun all unnecessary crossness and singularity; **"keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace with all true believers"** (Eph. 4:3); and patiently leave the issue to God.

(3.) If you are distasted through prejudice, and have long laboured without any notable success, advise with your brethren whether you should not remove, and another be not fitter for that people, and you for another, and do accordingly.

(This study will continue in the next issue, D.V.)





New Testament Study: Matthew 16:13-20

“Who Do You Say I Am?”

¹³When Jesus came to the region of Caesarea Philippi, He asked His disciples, “Who do people say the Son of Man is?”

¹⁴They replied, “Some say John the Baptist; others say Elijah; and still others, Jeremiah or one of the prophets.”

¹⁵“But what about you?” He asked. “Who do you say I am?”

¹⁶Simon Peter answered, “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.”

¹⁷Jesus replied, “Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah, for this was not revealed to you by man, but by my Father in heaven. ¹⁸And I tell you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it. ¹⁹I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven; whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven.” ²⁰Then He warned His disciples not to tell anyone that He was the Christ.

To draw His disciples out, Jesus asked them some questions: **“When Jesus came to the region of Caesarea Philippi, He asked His disciples, ‘Who do people say the Son of Man is?’”** (vs. 13). When Jesus spoke of the **“Son of Man”**, He was referring to Himself; He often referred to Himself that way.

The disciples summarized the opinions of the people concerning Jesus: **“They replied, ‘Some say John the Baptist; others say Elijah; and still others, Jeremiah or one of the prophets’”** (vs. 14). The opinions of the people are interesting, in that they were all respectful, yet not respectful enough. The opinions of the people were somewhat in agreement: they all thought Jesus was a prophet. Some held the same opinion that Herod had (see Matt. 14:1-2), that Jesus was some sort of reincar-

nated John the Baptist (although Jesus and John lived, for the most part, concurrently, and John had only recently died). Others thought that Jesus was Elijah, in fulfillment of the prophecy that Elijah would return before the Messiah came (see Mal. 4:5). Others thought Jesus was **“Jeremiah or one of the prophets”**, and so opinions were consistent that Jesus was a prophet, even a well-respected prophet, as were John the Baptist, Elijah and Jeremiah. However, to believe Jesus was a human prophet falls far short of believing Him to be Lord of the Universe. “Note, it is possible for men to have good thoughts of Christ, and yet not right ones; a high opinion of Him, and yet not high enough” [Henry].

“Clearly many people were impressed by Jesus and saw Him doing the kind of thing they thought prophets would do” [Morris, 420]. However, the people apparently did not think Jesus was acting as the Messiah would, for the popular view of the Messiah was as a conqueror. “No group was openly and thoughtfully confessing Jesus as Messiah... What we must recognize is that Christological confession was not cut and dried, black or white. It was possible to address Jesus with some messianic title without complete conviction, or while still holding some major misconceptions about the nature of His messiahship, and therefore stopping short of unqualified allegiance or outright confession” [Carson, 365].

Jesus asked another question: **“But what about you? He asked. ‘Who do you say I am?’”** (vs. 15). For each of us, this is a far more important question than the previous one. As far as our personal destiny is concerned, it doesn’t matter what others think about Jesus; it only matters what we think. Each of us must answer this question for himself.

Peter speaks up with his answer: **“Simon Peter answered, ‘You are the Christ, the Son of the living God’”** (vs. 16). Peter gives a brief answer, “but one which contains the whole sum of our salvation” [Calvin, 184]. In this answer, Peter confesses Jesus as Savior (**“You are the Christ”**), and as Son of God.

Jesus was pleased with Peter’s answer: **“Jesus replied, ‘Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah, for this was not revealed to you by man, but by my Father in heaven’”** (vs. 17). Indeed, all those who make a confession of Christ are **“Blessed”**: They are **“blessed”** to have the eternal life that accompanies saving knowledge of Christ; and they are **“blessed”** that such knowledge was **“revealed”** to them by our gracious **“Father in heaven.”** Peter was especially **“blessed”** to this have realization of who Christ is, because he was living amongst those who did not realize who Christ is. The religious leaders of the time were hostile towards Jesus. Even those who were not hostile thought Jesus to be at best a prophet. “Men forget that it is a widely different thing to believe in Christ’s divine mission when we dwell in the midst of professing Christians, and to believe in it when we dwell in the midst of those who are

hardened and unbelieving. The glory of Peter's confession lies in this—that he made it when few were with Christ and many against Him. He made it when the rulers of his own nation, the Scribes, and Priests, and Pharisees, were all opposed to his Master; he made it when our Lord was in the **'form of a servant'**, without wealth, without royal dignity, without any visible mark of a king. To make such a confession at such a time, required great faith and great decision of character" [Ryle, 196]. "To lift them out of all the perplexed conceptions due to their education and environment, and fix them in the conviction that one without scepter or army or even home, is the Messiah, required revelation from the Father" [Broadus, 355].

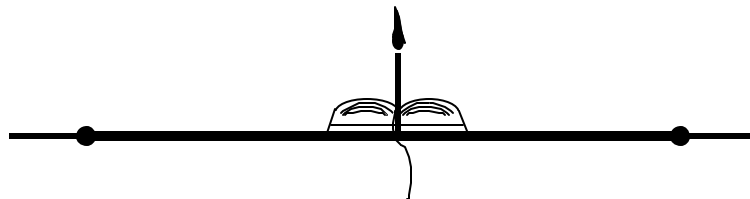
Peter's confession of Christ prompted Jesus to reveal what He had in store for Peter: **"And I tell you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it"** (vs. 18). Jesus used the name of Peter, which means "rock", to illustrate the role Peter would have in building the eternal body of Christ, His church. Peter, the "rock", was to be the foundation; and indeed, in the book of Acts, we see that Peter was the foundation. With his magnificent sermon on the day of Pentecost, Peter ushered in the church age (see Acts 2). And since that day, true to Christ's words, despite much opposition throughout the ages, the **"gates of Hades"** have not overcome the Church.

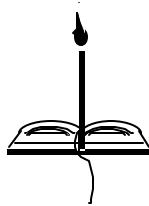
Jesus expanded on His promise: **"I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven; whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven"** (vs. 19). This last promise was not limited to Peter. We know this because, later, Jesus would make the same promise to His disciples in general: **"I tell you the truth, whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven"** (Matt. 18:18). This promise is somewhat cryptic: it is not clear at all to me what Jesus means by **"loosing"** and **"binding"** things in heaven and earth. Our inability to fully comprehend what this promise means is understandable, for we know so little about the heavenly realm. Given the vagueness to us of the promise, there is, of course, much controversy as to what it means. But from the passage in Matthew 18, we can infer that it has something to do with prayer, for there Jesus followed this promise with another promise: **"Again, I tell you that if two of you on earth agree about anything you ask for, it will be done for you by my Father in heaven. For where two or three come together in my name, there am I with them"** (Matt. 18:19–20). Then also, the promise about **"binding"** and **"loosing"** in heaven and earth is preceded by a passage on church discipline, and how to deal with a brother who sins against you (see Matt. 18:15–17). Given this, one interpretation of the promise is

that, through fervent prayer in agreement with our brothers, we have the power to affect the course of spiritual warfare in the heavenly realms, so as to aid a brother who has fallen into sin.

Another possible interpretation of this promise turns on the fact that the phrases **“will be bound in heaven”** and **“will be loosed in heaven”** could also be translated **“will have been bound in heaven”** and **“will have been loosed in heaven”**. This translation would imply that the disciples do not so much have power to affect the heavenly realms, but rather, through the guidance of the Spirit, can administer the church according to God’s will as established in heaven. “Good reasons may be brought forward for holding that Jesus meant that the new community would exercise divinely given authority both in regulating its internal affairs and in deciding who would be admitted to and who excluded from its membership” [Morris, 427].

Jesus followed these promises with a warning: **“Then He warned His disciples not to tell anyone that He was the Christ”** (vs. 20). This was a command to His disciples specifically for that time. The reason for the command was that many people had the wrong idea about what the Messiah would do. If the disciples went around proclaiming that Jesus was the Messiah, there would have been a movement to crown Jesus the political ruler. “The term Messiah could all too easily be misinterpreted and understood, for example, in political terms. If the disciples had gone out proclaiming that Jesus was the Messiah, both they and their hearers would have thought of a glorious, conquering Messiah. They would have looked for armies and bloodshed and victories. To know that Jesus was the Messiah was one thing; to understand what messiahship really meant was quite another” [Morris, 427]. This command, of course, is no longer in effect; though ironically and sadly, it is an oft-kept command. We are free to proclaim from the rooftops the Lordship of Jesus Christ, yet we remain silent.





A Topical Study: Self-Examination

The Necessity of Self-Examination, pt. 4 by Jonathan Edwards (1703-1758)

Search me, O God, and know my heart; try me, and know my thoughts; and see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting. (Ps. 139:23-24, AV).

Section 3

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

This, as hath been observed, is a difficult thing to be known; but it is not a matter of so much difficulty, but that if persons were sufficiently concerned about it, and strict and thorough in inquiring and searching, it might, for the most part, be discovered; men might know whether they live in any way of sin, or not. Persons who are deeply concerned to please and obey God, need not, under the light we enjoy, go on in the ways of sin through ignorance.

It is true that our hearts are exceedingly deceitful; but God, in His holy word, hath given that light with respect to our duty, which is accommodated to the state of darkness in which we are. So that by thorough care and inquiry, we may know our duty, and know whether or not we live in any sinful way. And every one, who hath any true love to God and His duty, will be glad of assistance in this inquiry. It is with such persons a concern which lies with much weight upon their spirits, in all things to walk, as God would have them, and so as to please and honour him. If they live in any way which is offensive to God, they will be glad to know it, and do by no means choose to have it concealed from them.

All those also, who in good earnest make the inquiry, "What shall I do to be saved?", will be glad to know whether they do not live in some sinful way of behaviour. For if they live in any such way, it is a great disadvantage to them with respect to that great concern. It behooves everyone who is seeking salvation, to know and avoid every sinful way in which he lives.

The means by which we must come to the knowledge of this, are two; viz. the knowledge of the rule, and the knowledge of ourselves.

1st, If we would know whether we do not live in some way of sin, we should take a great deal of pains to be thoroughly acquainted with the rule. — God hath given us a true and perfect rule, by which we ought to walk. And that we might be able, notwithstanding our darkness, and the disadvantages which attend us, to know our duty, He hath laid the rule before us abundantly. What a full and abundant revelation of the mind of God have we in the Scriptures! And how plain is it in what relates to practice! How often are rules repeated! In how many various forms are they revealed, that we might the more fully understand them!

But to what purpose will all this care of God to inform us be, if we reject the revelation which God hath made of His mind, and take no care to become acquainted with it? It is impossible that we should know whether we do not live in a way of sin, unless we know the rule by which we are to walk. The sinfulness of any way consists in its disagreement from the rule, and we cannot know whether it agree with the rule or not, unless we be acquainted with the rule. **“By the law is the knowledge of sin”** (Romans 3:20).

Therefore, lest we go in ways displeasing to God, we ought with the greatest diligence to study the rules which God hath given us. We ought to read and search the Holy Scriptures much, and do it with the design to know the whole of our duty, and in order that the word of God may be **“a lamp unto our feet, and a light unto our paths”** (Psalm 119:105). Everyone ought to strive to get knowledge in divine things, and to grow in such knowledge, to the end that he may know his duty, and know what God would have him to do.

These things being so, are not the greater part of men very much to blame in that they take no more pains or care to acquire the knowledge of divine things in that they no more study the Holy Scriptures, and other books which might inform them, as if it were the work of ministers only, to take pains to acquire this knowledge? But why is it so much a minister’s work to strive after knowledge, unless it be that others may acquire knowledge by him? — Will not many be found inexcusable in the small ways in which they live through ignorance and mistake, because their ignorance is a willful, allowed ignorance? They are ignorant of their duty, but it is their own fault they are so; they have advantages enough to know, and may know it if they will but they take pains to acquire knowledge, and to be well skilled in their outward affairs, upon which their temporal interest depends, but will not take pains to know their duty.

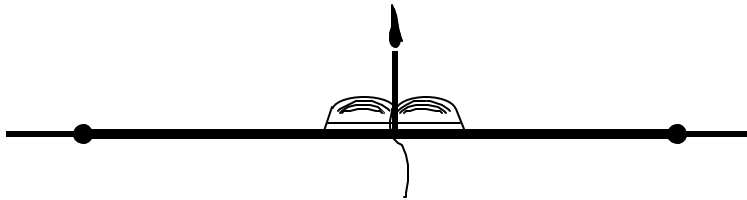
We ought to take great pains to be well informed, especially in those things which immediately concern us, or which relate to our particular cases.

2ndly, The other mean is the knowledge of ourselves, as subject to the

rule. — If we would know whether we do not live in some way of sin, we should take the utmost care to be well acquainted with ourselves, as well as with the rule, that we may be able to compare ourselves with the rule. When we have found what the rule is, then we should be strict in examining ourselves, whether or not we be conformed to the rule. This is the direct way in which our characters are to be discovered. It is one thing wherein man differs from brute creatures, that he is capable of self-reflection, or of reflecting upon his own actions, and what passes in his own mind, and considering the nature and quality of them. And doubtless it was partly for this end that God gave us this power, which is denied to other creatures, that we might know ourselves, and consider our own ways.

We should examine our hearts and ways, until we have satisfactorily discovered either their agreement or disagreement with the rules of Scripture. This is a matter that requires the utmost diligence, lest we overlook our own irregularities, lest some evil way in us should lie hid under disguise, and pass unobserved. One would think we are under greater advantages to be acquainted with ourselves than with anything else, for we are always present with ourselves, and have an immediate consciousness of our own actions: all that passeth in us, or is done by us, is immediately under our eye. Yet really in some respects the knowledge of nothing is so difficult to be obtained, as the knowledge of ourselves. We should therefore use great diligence in prying into the secrets of our hearts, and in examining all our ways and practices.

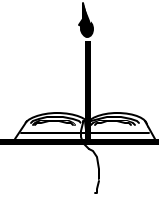
(This study will be continued, D.V.)



“Make up your spiritual accounts daily; see how matters stand between God and your souls. Often reckonings keep God and conscience friends. Do with your hearts as you do with your watches, wind them up every morning by prayer, and at night examine whether your hearts have gone true all that day, whether the wheels of your affections have moved swiftly toward heaven.”

-- Thomas Watson (1620- 1686)

A Study in Psalms: Psalm 62



Psalm 62 - God Alone

For the director of music. For Jeduthun. A psalm of David.

- ¹My soul finds rest in God alone;
my salvation comes from Him.
- ²He alone is my rock and my salvation;
He is my fortress, I will never be shaken.
- ³How long will you assault a man?
Would all of you throw him down—
this leaning wall, this tottering fence?
- ⁴They fully intend to topple him
from his lofty place;
they take delight in lies.
With their mouths they bless,
but in their hearts they curse. *Selah*
- ⁵Find rest, O my soul, in God alone;
my hope comes from Him.
- ⁶He alone is my rock and my salvation;
He is my fortress, I will not be shaken.
- ⁷My salvation and my honor depend on God;
He is my mighty rock, my refuge.
- ⁸Trust in Him at all times, O people;
pour out your hearts to Him,
for God is our refuge. *Selah*
- ⁹Lowborn men are but a breath,
the highborn are but a lie;
If weighed on a balance, they are nothing;
together they are only a breath.
- ¹⁰Do not trust in extortion
or take pride in stolen goods;
Though your riches increase,
do not set your heart on them.
- ¹¹One thing God has spoken,
two things have I heard:
That You, O God, are strong,
¹²and that You, O Lord, are loving.
Surely You will reward each person
according to what he has done.

We are told in the inscription that the psalm is “for Jeduthun”, who was one of the directors of music under David’s supervision (see I Chron. 25). There is no occasion given for this psalm in the inscription, which is just as well, for this psalm has general application. We can all strive for the state of mind that can say, with David: **“My soul finds rest in God alone; my salvation comes from Him. He alone is my rock and my salvation; He is my fortress, I will never be shaken”** (vss. 1-2). The key words in these verses is **“alone”**. Most of us find rest in God, somewhat, at times, but do we find rest in **“God alone”**? Is He our only **“rock”** and only **“salvation”**? Or do we depend also on things of the world—on money, on our strength, on our cunning? “They trust not God at all who trust Him not *alone*. He that stands with one foot on a rock, and another foot upon quicksand, will sink and perish, as certainly as he that standeth with both feet upon a quicksand” [Spurgeon]. “True piety finds and pronounces God all-sufficient. The proffer of another is an offence to the believer as it is to God Himself” [Plumer, 627].

David underscores the need to trust in God alone, by describing the assault upon those who do not: **“How long will you assault a man? Would all of you throw him down—this leaning wall, this tottering fence? They fully intend to topple him from his lofty place; they take delight in lies. With their mouths they bless, but in their hearts they curse”** (vss. 3-4). Those who do not trust in **“God alone”** are like **“leaning walls”** and **“tottering fences”**. Because of their vulnerability, they are under special attack by the evil one. Note that the primary method of attack is falsehood and flattery: **“They take delight in lies. With their mouths they bless, but in their hearts they curse.”** “Flattery has ever been a favorite weapon with the enemies of good men; they can curse bitterly enough when it serves their turn; meanwhile, since it answers their purpose, they mask their wrath, and with smooth words pretend to bless those whom they would willingly tear in pieces” [Spurgeon].

In the midst of such attacks, David must renew his resolve. He exhorts himself to stay the course: **“Find rest, O my soul, in God alone; my hope comes from Him”** (vs. 5). “The soul is apt to be dragged away from its anchorage, or is readily tempted to add a second confidence to the one sole and sure ground of reliance; we must, therefore, stir ourselves up to maintain the holy position which we were at first able to assume” [Spurgeon].

David reminds himself of the reasons for his resolution: **“He alone is my rock and my salvation; He is my fortress, I will not be shaken. My salvation and my honor depend on God; He is my mighty rock, my refuge”** (vss. 6-7). David’s possessive language regarding *his* God reflect the close relationship he has with the Lord. “Observe how the psalmist brands his own initials upon every name which he rejoicingly gives to his God—*my* hope, *my* rock, *my* salvation, *my* strength, *my* refuge; he is not content to know that the Lord is all these things; he acts faith

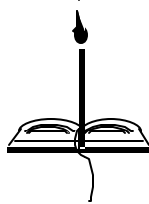
towards Him, and lays claim to Him under every character... It is the word *my* which puts the honey into the comb. If our experience has not yet enabled us to realize the Lord under any of these consoling titles, we must seek grace that we may be partakers of their sweetness" [Spurgeon].

David wants everyone to experience the benefits of trusting in God alone. He exhorts us: "**Trust in Him at all times, O people; pour out your hearts to Him, for God is our refuge**" (vs. 8). We are not only to "**trust in Him**", we are to trust in Him "**at all times.**" "Faith is an abiding duty, a perpetual privilege" [Spurgeon]. In good times, in bad times, trust in Him. Some people find it easy to trust in God during good times, but when affliction comes, they lose hope, and think that God has deserted them. "**Trust in Him at all times.**" Others turn to God in times of affliction, but during good times, they turn their back on Him and forget He's there. "**Trust in Him at all times.**"

We must trust in God, for there is no one earth upon which we can depend: "**Lowborn men are but a breath, the highborn are but a lie; if weighed on a balance, they are nothing; together they are only a breath**" (vs. 9). We instinctively know that we can't trust in "**lowborn men**", but we equally cannot trust in "**the highborn.**" It is a "**lie**" of the world that a rich man has more intrinsic value than a poor man. Both are mere humans, soon to return to dust. As compared to God, "**they are nothing; together they are only a breath.**" A highborn man's riches cannot save him from death. And in fact, riches can be harmful, for they "**lie**" by giving false security. "Carnal confidence is not only unable to help a man, when he hath most need, but also bringeth damage unto him, and makes him to find God in his jealousy an adversary and just judge to plague and curse him; and so if the matter be well weighed, creature-help, and creature-comfort, when it is relied upon, is worse than no help" [Dickson, 368].

Furthermore, riches are often gained immorally. Moreover, the more riches one has, the more opportunity and resources he has to act immoral to gain yet more riches. David warns: "**Do not trust in extortion or take pride in stolen goods; though your riches increase, do not set your heart on them**" (vs. 10). Increasing riches give us false hope. We think that God approves of what we are doing just because our lucre increases. We even convince ourselves that God sanctions our corrupt ways in gaining riches. Riches ever deceive: "**Do not set your heart on them.**"

David concludes by giving two compelling reasons to trust in God alone: "**One thing God has spoken, two things have I heard: that You, O God, are strong, and that You, O Lord, are loving. Surely You will reward each person according to what he has done**" (vss. 11-12). What a beautiful summarizing statement of why we should trust in God: He is "**strong**"; He is "**loving**". Because He is "**strong**", He has the power and ability to rescue us from any situation; because He is "**loving**", He has the desire to work out everything for our good. Praise the Lord! What a great God we have!



A Meditation The Spiritual Chemist

A Meditation Upon the Sight of a Lily and a Violet by William Spurstowe (ca. 1666)

These two flowers brought to my mind a saying of Hierom to this effect, "That it is better and more honorable to be a lily than a violet", which, when stripped of its metaphorical clothing comes to thus much: that to be always pure is more commendable, than to bear the blush of a sin. Spotless innocency doth far exceed the greatest penitency. A truth questionless it is beyond controversy, and no way needing the aid of the school to determine: the innocent is more worthy than any penitent. Innocency being the only robe of glory, with which man was covered when first created; and of which, had he not divested himself, he had never experienced shame, or sorrow; they both being passions that had their entrance into the world with sin, and shall in the same moment with it die and expire. But yet next to this virgin purity from sin: The most desirable thing is true and unfeigned penitency for sin, which, though it cannot restore a man to his primitive state (time, lost, and innocency being two irrecoverable things), yet it will (through God's ordination) abundantly capacitate him for mercy and pardon. When Ephraim smote upon the thigh, and was ashamed, because he bare the reproach

of his youth, how earnestly did God remember him: **“Is Ephraim my dear Son?”** When the prodigal returns a penitent, how affectionately doth his father embrace him, and falling upon his neck kiss him? How doth he cut off, and prevent a part of his confession, which he was purposed with himself to have made, by his speedy calling for the ring, the robe, the shoes, to adorn him, and the fatted calf to feast him? O blessed Lord! How willingly would I therefore (who have nothing of the unspotted purity of the lily) partake plentifully of the tincture of the violet? How fain would I, who have had a forehead to commit sin before Thee, have a face to blush for sin done against Thee? My sins are as the sand of the sea for number, O that my tears were as the water of the sea for abundance. But who, Lord, can make me of a proud and unhallowed sinner, a real and broken convert but thyself? That grace, by which mine whole man must be molded to a penitential frame, is altogether Thine: heart, hand, eyes, tongue, cannot in the least move without Thee: they are lifeless members till Thou quicken them; yea rebellious till Thou subdue them: do Thou therefore by a powerful energy fit every part for its proper duty; let my hand smite the breast, as the fountain and root from whence all mine iniquities do spring; let my tongue confess them, mine eye mourn for them, by face blush, and my heart bleed for them: then shall I unfeignedly say, and acknowledge, **“My ruin is from myself, but in Thee is my help O Lord.”**

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The Importance of Knowing Christ

"It is a growing conviction in my mind, that vital and influential Christianity consists, much more than is ordinarily apprehended, in an intimate personal acquaintance and friendship with our Lord Jesus Christ. He is the great revealer of God; he is the revealed Divinity. . . To be a Christian, it is not enough that we know and acknowledge a system of doctrine and of law, deduced from the sayings of our Lord and the writings of his apostles. It is necessary that we be acquainted with His person, His character, and His work; that we know the doctrines of Christianity as His mind, the laws of Christianity as His will. The very life of Christianity consists in loving, confiding in, obeying Him, and God in Him; and He plainly can be loved, confided in, and obeyed, only in the degree in which He is known.."

-- John Brown

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