

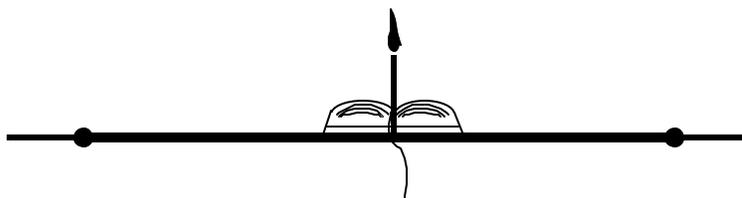
Scripture Studies

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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 7-11

The Plagues Upon Egypt, pt. 2, by Arthur W. Pink (1886-1952)

¹⁹The Lord said to Moses, "Tell Aaron, 'Take your staff and stretch out your hand over the waters of Egypt—over the streams and canals, over the ponds and all the reservoirs—and they will turn to blood. Blood will be everywhere in Egypt, even in the wooden buckets and stone jars.'" (Ex. 7:19)

⁶So Aaron stretched out his hand over the waters of Egypt, and the frogs came up and covered the land. ⁷But the magicians did the same things by their secret arts; they also made frogs come up on the land of Egypt. (Ex. 8:6-7)

¹⁶Then the LORD said to Moses, "Tell Aaron, 'Stretch out your staff and strike the dust of the ground, and throughout the land of Egypt the dust will become gnats.'" ¹⁷They did this, and when Aaron stretched out his hand with the staff and struck the dust of the ground, gnats came upon men and animals. All the dust throughout the land of Egypt became gnats. (Ex. 8:16-17)

²⁴And the LORD did this. Dense swarms of flies poured into Pharaoh's palace and into the houses of his officials, and throughout Egypt the land was ruined with flies. (Ex. 8:24)

⁶And the next day, the Lord did it: All the livestock of the Egyptians died, but not one animal belonging to the Israelites died. (Ex. 9:6)

In our last article we made a number of general observations upon the judgments which the Lord God sent upon Pharaoh and his people. The

subject is admittedly a difficult one, and little light seems to have been given on it. This should make *us* seek more fervently for help from above, that *our* eyes may be opened to behold wondrous things in this portion of the Word. We shall now offer a few remarks upon each plague separately according to our present understanding of them.

1. The first plague is described in Exodus 7:14-25 — let the reader turn to the passage and ponder it carefully. This initial judgment from the Lord consisted of the turning of the waters into blood. Blood, of course, speaks of death, and death is the wages of sin. It was, therefore, a most solemn warning from God to Egypt, a warning which intimated plainly the doom that awaited those who defied the Almighty. Similarly will God give warning at the beginning of the Great Tribulation, for then shall the moon **“become as blood”** (Revelation 6:12). The symbolic significance of this first plague is easily discerned. water is the emblem of the Word (John 15:3; Ephesians 5:26), and the water turned to blood reminds us that the Word is **“a savor of death unto death”** (2 Corinthians 2:16) as well as **“of life unto life”**.

The striking contrast between this first plague and the first miracle wrought by the Lord Jesus has been pointed out by others before us. The contrast strikingly illustrates the great difference there is between the two dispensations; **“The law was given by Moses, but grace and truth came by Jesus Christ”** (John 1:17). All that the Law can do to its guilty transgressor is to sentence him to death, and this is what the Water turned into blood symbolized. But by the incarnate Word the believing sinner is made to *rejoice*, and this is what the turning of the water into wine speaks of.

Before passing on to the next plague we would offer a word of explanation upon a point which may have troubled some of our readers. The Lord’s command to Moses was: **“Say unto Aaron, Take thy rod and stretch out thine hand upon the waters of Egypt, upon their streams, upon their rivers, and upon their ponds, and upon all their pools of water, that they may become blood”** (Exodus 7:19). And yet after this we are told, **“And the magicians of Egypt did so with their enchantments”** (v. 22). Where then did they obtain *their* water? The answer is evidently supplied in verse 24: **“And all the Egyptians digged round about the river for water to drink.”**

2. The second plague is described in Exodus 8:1-7. An interval of **“seven days”** (7:25) separated this second plague from the first. Full opportunity was thus given to Pharaoh to repent, before God acted in judgment again. In view of the fact that the Flood commenced on the *seventh* day (see Gen. 7:10 margin), that is, the holy Sabbath, the conclusion is highly probable that each of these first two plagues were sent upon Egypt on the *Sabbath* day, as a Divine judgment for the Egyptians’ desecration of it.

This second plague, like the former, was Divinely directed against the

idolatry of the Egyptians. The river Nile was sacred in their eyes, therefore did Jehovah turn its waters into blood. The frog was an object of worship among them, so God now caused Egypt to be plagued with frogs. Their ugly shape, their croaking noise, and their disagreeable smell, would make these frogs peculiarly obnoxious. Their abounding numbers marked the severity of this judgment. Escape from this scourge was impossible, for the frogs not only **“covered the land of Egypt”** but they invaded the homes of the Egyptians, entered their bed-chambers, and defiled their cooking utensils. The moral significance of these **“frogs”** is explained for us in Revelation 16:13 — the only mention of these creatures in the New Testament. There we read, **“And I saw three unclean small spirits like frogs come out of the mouth of the Dragon, and out of the mouth of the Beast, and out of the mouth of the False Prophet.”** Frogs are used to symbolize the powers of evil and stand for *uncleanness*. The turning of the waters into blood was a solemn reminder of the **“wages of sin”**. The issuing forth of the frogs made manifest the character of the devil’s works — uncleanness.

Concerning this second plague we read, **“And the magicians did so with their enchantments and brought forth frogs upon the land of Egypt”** (8:7). This is most suggestive. The magicians were unable to remove the frogs, nor could they erect any barriers against their encroachments. All they could do was to bring forth more frogs. Thus it is with the Prince of this world. He is unable to exterminate the evil which he has brought into God’s fair creation, and he cannot check its progress. All he can do is to multiply wickedness.

3. The third plague is described in Exodus 8:16-19. This judgment descended without any warning. The dust of the ground suddenly sprang into life, assuming the most disgusting and annoying form. This blow was aimed more directly at the persons of the Egyptians. Their bodies covered with lice, was a sore rebuke to their pride. Herodotus (2:37) refers to the cleanliness of the Egyptians: “So scrupulous were the priests on this point that they used to shave their heads and bodies every third day, for fear of harboring vermin while occupied in their sacred duties”. As another has said, “This stroke would therefore humble their pride and stain their glory, rendering *themselves* objects of dislike and disgust”. The key to the moral significance of this third plague lies in the *source* from which the lice proceeded. Aaron smote the *dust* of the land **“and it became lice in man and beast”** (8:16). In the judgment which God pronounced upon disobedient Adam we read that He said, **“Cursed is the ground for thy sake”** (Genesis 3:17), and again, **“for dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return”** (Genesis 3:19). When Aaron *smote* the **“ground”**, and its **“dust”** became lice, and the lice came upon the Egyptians, it was a graphic showing-forth of the awful fact that man by nature is *under the curse* of a holy God.

Concerning this plague we read, **“and the magicians did so with their enchantments to bring forth lice, but they could not”** (8:18). How small a matter the Lord used to bring confusion upon these magicians! As soon as God restrained them, they were helpless. Turn water into blood, and bring forth frogs, they might, by God’s permission; but when He withheld permission they were impotent. Thus it is with Satan himself. His bounds are definitely prescribed by the Almighty, and beyond them he cannot go. Death he can inflict (by God’s permission), and uncleanness he can bring forth freely — as the **“magicians”** illustrated in the first two plagues; but with the Curse (which the **“dust”** becoming lice so plainly speaks of) he is not allowed to tamper with.

The admission of the magicians on this occasion is noteworthy: **“Then the magicians said unto Pharaoh, This is the finger of God”** (8:19). These are their *last* recorded words. In the end they were obliged to acknowledge the hand of God. So will it be in the last Great Day with the Devil himself, and with all his hosts and victims. They, too, will have to bow before the Lord, and publicly confess the supremacy of the Almighty.

There is a striking correspondency between this third plague and what is recorded in the eighth chapter of John’s Gospel. There we find a similar contest — between the Lord and His enemies. The Scribes and the Pharisees, using the woman taken in adultery as their bait, sought to ensnare the Savior. His only response was to stoop down and write *on the ground*. After saying to them, **“He that is without sin among you, let him first cast a stone at her”** (John 8:7), we read that **“Again He stooped down and wrote on the ground”** (John 8:8). The effect was startling: **“They which heard, being convicted by their conscience, went out one by one....and Jesus was left alone, and the woman standing in the midst”** (John 8:9). What was this but the enemy of the Lord acknowledging that it was **“the finger of God”** as He wrote in *the dust!*

4. The next plague is described in Exodus 8:20-32. This plague marked the beginning of a new series. In the first three, the magicians had opposed, but their defeat had been openly manifested. No longer do they appear upon the stage of action. Another thing which evidences that this fourth plague begins a new series is the fact that God now made “a division” between His own people and the Egyptians. The Israelites too had suffered from the first three judgments, for they also merited the wages of sin, were subject to the debasing influences of Satan, and were under the curse. But now that the Lord was about to destroy the property of the Egyptians, He spared the Israelites.

It will be noted by the student that the words **“of flies”** are in italics, supplied by the translators, the word **“swarms”** being given for the original term. The Hebrew word signifies, literally, “mixture”, being akin to the term **“mixed multitude”** in Exodus 12:38. Apparently these **“swarms”** were made up of not only flies, but a variety of insects. As we

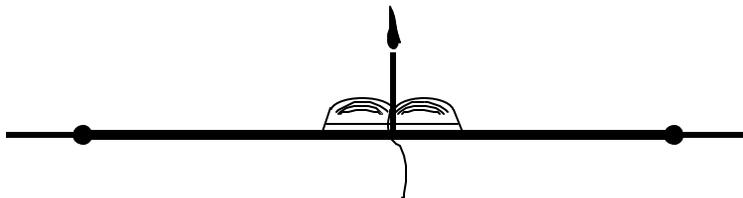
are told in Psalm 78:45, “**He sent divers sorts of flies**”. Moreover, this verse in the Psalms informs us of their devastating effects — they “**devoured them**”; the Hebrew signifying “ate up”. This was, therefore, worse than the plague of lice. The lice annoyed, but the “**divers sorts of flies**” preyed upon their flesh.

The deeper meaning of this plague may be gathered from the nature of its effects, and also from the fact that the Israelites were exempted from it. This judgment had to do with *the tormenting of the bodies* of the Egyptians, thus looking forward to the eternal judgment of the lost, when their bodies shall be tormented forever and ever in the Lake which burneth with fire and brimstone. In this the people of God will have no part.

5. The next plague is described in Exodus 9:1-7. This judgment was directed against the possessions of the Egyptians. A grievous disease smote their herds so that “**all the cattle of Egypt died**”. But once more Jehovah exempted His own people — “**of the cattle of the children of Israel died not one**” (9:6). This afforded a striking demonstration of the absolute rulership of God. He completely controls every creature He has made. Disease strikes only when and where He has decreed. The herds of the Egyptians might be dying all around them, but the cattle of Israel were as secure as though there had been no epidemic at all.

The spiritual meaning and application of this judgment is not difficult to perceive. The cattle are man’s servants. He harnesses them to do the hardest portion of his work. The destruction of all the “**horses, asses, camels, oxen and sheep**” of the Egyptians tells us that God will not accept the labors of the unregenerate — “**the plowing of the wicked is sin**” (Proverbs 21:4). This world and all its works will yet be burned up — destroyed as completely as were the beasts of Egypt. The sparing of the cattle of the Israelites intimates that the works of the new nature in the believer will “**abide**” (1 Corinthians 3:14).

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



A Classic Study: Patience in Affliction



A Classic Study by Richard Baxter (1615–1691)

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

No Probability That Ever the World Should Be Much Better

It adds much to the trial of our faith and patience, that there is no apparent means of deliverance, nor probability, in the eye of reason, that ever the world should become better, but it groweth worse and worse. This case indeed is a great trial of our faith and patience: but let us consider,

1. That this world was never intended to be the place of our felicity or long abode, but only, as is aforesaid, as the womb where we are conceived and formed for a better world; or as the wilderness to the Israelites, where they were to be tried by difficulties in their way to the land of promise: or as a winter journey through dirty or craggy ways homeward. And what if this womb, this wilderness, these ways never amend? What man is so weak as to be discouraged, because posterity is like to find the ways as foul or rough as he has done? Or because the deserts of Libya, or Arabia, or the dangerous passages over the Alps, will be no better to the next generation than they are to this? It is indeed the desire of every true Christian that the world were better; and these desires are not vain; they show the honesty of them that wish it: but God will not do all that He hath made it our duty to desire. We must desire the conversion and salvation of many that will never will be converted and saved.

2. God will give us all that we desire, but it is not on earth. If we did still see by the faith the greater, perfect, glorious, which we are near, it would quiet us against all our perplexing doubts and troubles in this world. All is well in heaven, even better than we can desire: there is no ignorance, no infidelity, no atheism, no wars, no sects, no cruelties, no contentions; reformation is there perfect, and the church all holy.

3. In all reason our affections should be but proportioned to their objects. It is our duty to mourn for the miserable world, and the corrupt state

of the church on earth; but seeing the heavenly glory incomparably exceedeth the world's misery, our joy should be far greater to think of heaven, than our jail is compared to all this kingdom, yea, to all the kingdoms on earth; and it is our duty to be sorry, if those in prison do not amend and that those must die that are condemned. But should we not more rejoice, if it went as well as we could wish it with all the rest of the kingdom, or of the world. Heaven, which is many thousand times bigger than earth, hath nothing but perfect felicity and glory, perfect knowledge, love, and joy.

4. And this earth shall serve to all God's ends. He will gather all His chosen; and He will be glorified in His providence towards the rest. Out of this Bedlam Christ bringeth many to saving wisdom; and out of this jail God's mercy taketh many sons to glory: He reprieveth all, and pardoneth all that are penitent believers; and traitors and enemies are reconciled to Him by Christ, and being justified with peace with God. God placed man in an earthly paradise as a passage to a heavenly; and man's own willful sin and folly turned his paradise into a prison and it is now a house of correction, where God joineth instruction, and by the book and rod doth teach His chosen saving wisdom: and as the Isrealites in the wilderness had their suitable mercies for their forty years; and as Jeremy led the captive Jews to build, and plant, and marry in Babylon, and pray for its peace, as the place in which their own peace must be had, till seventy years were past (which is the age of man), so God here giveth us great mercies suitable to our wilderness and captive state; and when a little is over, we shall have better than we could here believe. And though I would not cherish that sinful desire, which would have that on earth which is proper to heaven, now have I skill enough in the exposition of hard prophecies to make a particular determination about the thousand years reign of Christ on earth before the final judgment, yet I may say, that I cannot confute what such learned men as Mr. Mead, Dr. Twisse, and others (after the old fathers) have hereof asserted. And I am certain that Christ teacheth us all to pray that God's name may be hallowed, His kingdom come, and His will be done, on earth as it is in heaven; and that He appointeth us to use no prayer or means in vain. And many are ready to believe the old saying, that as the world was made in six days, and the seventh was made a day of holy rest, and a day with the Lord is as a thousand years; so after six thousand of sin and sorrow, a thousand years of holy rest follow. Of this I am uncertain: but I believe there will be a new heaven and earth, in which will dwell righteousness. We must not look for too great matters in a sinful, cursed earth. We would fain have all the blessedness of heaven, but are loathe to die, and therefore would have it here on earth; and the rather because as hearsay without sight doth not give a man a satisfactory conception we would have of heaven. But death is the wages of sin, and die we must; but the gift of God is eternal life, through Him who hath overcome him that

hath the power of death, by the fear of which we are kept in bondage" (see Rom. 6:23; Heb. 2:14-15). And we may rejoice by an implicit trust to Christ, in the hope of that glory which we can in the flesh have no explicit idea or conception of; where will be no sin, no death, no fear, no imperfection, no unbelief, or censorious distaste at any of God's words or works; but beatifying vision, and fullness of everlasting joy in glory.

And against this and other objections, you must still remember that a suffering condition is not so bad for the church on earth, as unbelief and flesh would make you think. For,

1. A fleshly prosperity is too brutish and short to be true felicity. It is the portion of the wicked, and the occasion of their deceit and ruin (see Ps. 17:14; Luke 12:15,20,21). And is the church less happy, because it is saved from so dangerous temptations?

2. Forget not the invaluable riches of the church, in its lowest state. Their God, their Christ, their Comforter, the promises, and all suitable providences fitted to their good, are a thousandfold greater riches and honour, than all the kingdoms and power of the ungodly world.

3. The church in its most depressed state, hath impregnable strength and safety; their God is invincible; their Saviour is the rock which the gates of hell shall not prevail against (see Matt. 16:18).

4. When they are most scorned and contemned, and used as fools and rogues, and as the basest and most odious of mankind; they are the members of Christ, the children of God, and bear the image, and are the charge of angels, and passing to a crown of glory. And what is dishonor from man, as set against such honors with God and all the blessed? **"Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God"** (Matt. 5:8). **"The reproach of Christ is greater riches than worldlings' treasure,"** (Heb. 11:26; see also Eph. 2:7; 5:25,27; 1:22, 23; 3:10).

5. Remember that the far greatest part of the church, even all since the creation, are in possession of heaven already, and it is but a small remnant as the gleanings, that are here yet behind; read the description of them in Heb. 12:22,23. Christ is not ashamed to call them brethren (see Heb. 2:11); and useth them as such: in His Father's house He hath many mansions for them (see John 14:1-3). And if you saw all those millions in heaven with Christ, could you for shame grudge that the few behind are passing thither through temptation and tribulation? Or that it must be as by swimming, or on broken pieces of the ship, that they must come all safe to land? (See Acts 27). If all be well in heaven, grudge not at the way: these things are never the worse or most uncertain in themselves, for being unseen.

6. And how great security hath God given the church of all this heavenly glory promised. Can we fear that Christ will be defeated of the great design of man's redemption, and reigning in the new Jerusalem, which He is to be its light instead of the sun?

7. And doth not God love His church much better than we do; and better know how to deal with it, and all the world? Shall we, blind sinners, who do nothing thoroughly well, be afraid, lest God will miscarry, or do anything amiss?

8. The church must have its purgatory on earth: and prosperity filleth it with hypocrites who corrupt it; and adversity must refine from such dross.

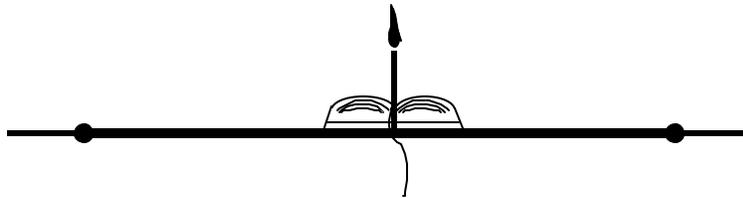
9. Particular Christians are better by affliction; and what else is the church but particular Christians? God will not leave out temptations to the damning love of the world too strong.

10. The church must be conformed to its Head, who suffered, and then entered into glory.

11. While all individuals are sinful and imperfect, what wonder if all the church do suffer by it?

12. Most graces must shine and increase by exercise; like some jewels that must be rubbed: as fire in a flint, or steel, that must be called into sight by violence. We are but common men in appearance, till somewhat more than common work or suffering call us out, and show our difference from hypocrites.

These and many such considerations before intimated may convince us that the worse state of the church or world is no just cause of censuring God's providence, not of discouragement or impatience to any true believer: but still in patience we may possess our souls.



“It is not fit, since the Head was crowned with thorns, that the members should be crowned with rosebuds.”

-- Jerome Zanchius (1516- 1590)

New Testament Study: Matthew 18:10-20



The Value of Each and Every Child of God

¹⁰“See that you do not look down on one of these little ones. For I tell you that their angels in heaven always see the face of my Father in heaven.

¹²“What do you think? If a man owns a hundred sheep, and one of them wanders away, will he not leave the ninety-nine on the hills and go to look for the one that wandered off? ¹³And if he finds it, I tell you the truth, he is happier about that one sheep than about the ninety-nine that did not wander off. ¹⁴In the same way your Father in heaven is not willing that any of these little ones should be lost.

¹⁵“If your brother sins against you, go and show him his fault, just between the two of you. If he listens to you, you have won your brother over. ¹⁶But if he will not listen, take one or two others along, so that ‘every matter may be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses.’ ¹⁷If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church; and if he refuses to listen even to the church, treat him as you would a pagan or a tax collector.

¹⁸“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.

¹⁹“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. ²⁰For where two or three come together in my name, there am I with them.”

Jesus had just warned us of the seriousness of causing others to stumble into sin: **“Woe to the world because of the things that cause people to sin! Such things must come, but woe to the man through whom they come!”** (Matt. 18:7). God considers the causing of His children to stumble to be a great sin because He values each and every one of

His children, and does not want any of them to wander away from Him. Jesus here speaks of how God values each of His children: **“See that you do not look down on one of these little ones. For I tell you that their angels in heaven always see the face of my Father in heaven”** (vs. 10). The language **“their angels”** seems to imply that God assigns to each and every one of us one (or more) angels for our protection. And these angels have direct access to God for, as Jesus teaches, they **“always see the face of my Father in heaven.”** “Whatever may be the meaning of the remarkable expression **‘their angels’**—whether it be designed to teach us that each child of God is under the special care of one particular angel, or whether it mean no more than simply ‘the angelic guardians of believers’—the information communicated here only, that they do always behold the face of Christ’s Father in heaven, is surely designed to teach us how dear to God and how high in His favor each of them is, when even their guardians have uninterrupted and familiar access to their Father on their account” [JFB]. That angels interact with us is spoken of elsewhere in the Bible. In the book of Hebrews, the writer tells us: **“Are not all angels ministering spirits sent to serve those who will inherit salvation?”** (Heb. 1:14). “Their agency is represented as both concurring with, and controlling, the action of physical causes. They minister to God especially for the benefit of them that shall inherit salvation (Heb. 1:14, where **‘minister for them’** really meant this, but is popularly misunderstood as meaning minister to them). They protect the human servant of God when in danger and difficulty (see Ps. 91:11; Matt. 4:6). They are present during our worship, and we are enjoined to preserve decorum through respect for them (see I Cor. 11:10). In the judgment they will be agents in separating the righteous from the wicked (Matt. 13:41; Matt. 24:31). They can doubtless reach and affect our minds in the same way as is done by Satan and his subordinates, all of whom appear to be merely fallen angels; but like human teachers, they can influence the mind to spiritual good only by the help of the Holy Spirit, while our fallen nature offers itself readily to the influence of the fallen angels” [Broadus, 385].

Because of the great love that God has for each of His children, Jesus commands us that we are not to **“look down on one of these little ones”** (vs. 10). So, not only are we not to cause each other to stumble, but we are not even to **“look down”** on one another. As God values each and every one of us, so also we are to value each of our brothers and sisters. “We must not make a jest of their infirmities, not look upon them with contempt, not conduct ourselves scornfully or disdainfully toward them, as if we cared not what became of them... If Christ put such a value upon them, let us not undervalue them. If He denied Himself so much for their

salvation, surely we should deny ourselves for their edification and consolation" [Henry].

Jesus goes on to illustrate the care God has for each and every one of His children through a parable: **"What do you think? If a man owns a hundred sheep, and one of them wanders away, will he not leave the ninety-nine on the hills and go to look for the one that wandered off? And if he finds it, I tell you the truth, he is happier about that one sheep than about the ninety-nine that did not wander off. In the same way your Father in heaven is not willing that any of these little ones should be lost"** (vss. 12–13). It seems that there is no greater joy in heaven than when one who is lost is saved, for we are told a number of times of the rejoicing in heaven that goes on when this happens. This should not surprise us, for Jesus' primary mission on earth was to **"seek and to save what was lost"** (Luke 19:10).

In the same vein, Jesus goes on to instruct His followers how to deal with someone who has stumbled into sin: **"If your brother sins against you, go and show him his fault, just between the two of you. If he listens to you, you have won your brother over"** (vs. 15). This method of dealing with those who sin against us is somewhat radical, and unworldly. The way of the world is to hate those who sin against us. Jesus commands us to seek the good of those who do us wrong.

Note that we are to **"go"** to the sinning brother; we are not to wait until he first comes to us. We proactively go to him, just as the good shepherd goes out after the lost sheep.

First, we are to go to him in private. "Private admonitions must always go before public censures; if gentler methods will do the work, those that are more rough and severe must not be used" [Henry]. Our goal is not to embarrass our sinning brother by publishing his sin to the world, nor to show him up, nor is our goal to reproach him. No, our primary goal is, as Jesus said, to **"win our brother over."** If his sin can remain private, and he repent of it, this is the best result.

However, if this does not work: **"But if he will not listen, take one or two others along, so that 'every matter may be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses.'"** (vs. 16). Note, Jesus does not say, "But if he will not listen, then give up." No, we are to persevere in seeking to return our stumbling brothers to the right path. "We must not be weary of well-doing, though we see not presently the good success of it" [Henry]. The next step is to bring along **"two or three witnesses."** This will keep the matter reasonably private, while still giving the sinner the opportunity to repent. Further, the testimony of two or three witnesses will reinforce to the sinner that he is deviating from behavior befitting a Christian.

Then again, if this does not work: **“If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church; and if he refuses to listen even to the church, treat him as you would a pagan or a tax collector”** (vs. 17). The continued stubbornness of the sinner warrants making the matter public. And then, if he, after all this, perseveres in his sin, the matter is closed: he is to be treated as if he no longer is part of the fellowship of believers, as determined by the judgment of the Church.

Jesus goes on to speak of the authority given the Church: **“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”** (vs. 19). This somewhat enigmatic statement seems to be saying that the Spirit-led decisions made by the Church are sanctioned in heaven. “While ministers preach the word of Christ faithfully, and in their government of the church strictly adhere to His laws, they may be assured that He will own them, and stand by them, and will ratify what they say and do, so that it shall be taken as said and done by Himself” [Henry]. “The point is that the church has God’s authority to decide. The reference here is especially to the settlement of a difficulty between brethren, but the statement is a general one” [Broadus, 389].

The decisions of the Church must be settled upon through prayer: **“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”** (vs. 19). In context, it seems that Jesus is still speaking of the Church’s power to admonish a brother for his sin, and to seek his repentance. Such an important matter must be brought to God in prayer. “Prayer must go along with all our endeavors for the conversion of sinners” [Henry]. As James exhorts us: **“Therefore confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective”** (James 5:16).

Jesus then gives us a wonderful promise concerning His special presence among the fellowship of believers: **“For where two or three come together in my name, there am I with them”** (vs. 20). Note, this statement is an explicit claim by Jesus of His own divinity. Only God, of course, can be in more than one place at a time.

This promise of Jesus underscores the importance and the value of believers coming together in fellowship and prayer. This is the Church. The Church is not the Church without the gathering together of the saints, in worship, in prayer, in fellowship.

A Topical Study: Self-Examination



The Necessity of Self-Examination, pt. 10 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 9

Awakening consideration for self-examination

We come now to mention some things, in order to convince those who, upon examination, find that they do live in some way of sin, of the importance of their knowing and amending their manner of life. You have had directions laid before you, how to find out whether you do live in any way of sin or not; and you have heard many particulars mentioned as proper subjects for your examination of yourselves. How then do you find things? Do you find yourselves clear of living in any way of sin? I mean not whether you find yourself clear of sin; that is not expected of any of you; for there is not a man upon earth that doeth good, and sinneth not (see I Kings 8:46). But is there not some way of sin in which you live, which is your stated way or practice? There are doubtless some who are clear in this matter, some **“who are undefiled in the way, and do no iniquity,”** (Psalm 119:1, 3).

Let your own consciences answer how you find with respect to yourselves, by those things which have been proposed to you. Do you not find that you are guilty, that you live in a way of sin, and have allowed yourselves in it? — If this be the case, then consider the following things.

1. If you have been long seeking salvation, and have not yet succeeded, it may be this hath been the cause. You have perhaps wondered what hath been the matter, that you have been so long a time under concern about your salvation, that you have taken so much pains, and all seems to be to no purpose. You have many a time cried earnestly to God,

yet He doth not regard you. Others obtain comfort, but you are left in darkness. But is it any wonder at all, if you have lived in some way of sin all this while? If you have lived in any sinful way, this is a sufficient reason why all your prayers and all your pains have been blasted.

If all this while you have lived in some sinful way, so far you have failed of seeking salvation in the right way. The right way of seeking salvation is, to seek it in the diligent performance of all duties, and in the denial of all ungodliness. If there be any one member that is corrupt, and you cut it not off, there is danger that it will carry you to hell (see Matt. 5:29, 30).

2. If grace has not been flourishing, but, on the contrary, is languishing circumstances in your souls, perhaps this is the cause. The way to grow in grace is to walk in the way of obedience to all the commands of God, to be very thorough in the practice of religion. Grace will flourish in the hearts of those who live in this manner, but if you live in some way of sin, that will be like some secret disease at your vitals, which will keep you poor, weak, and languishing.

One way of sin lived in will wonderfully keep you down in your spiritual prosperity, and in the growth and strength of grace in your hearts. It will grieve the Holy Spirit of God, and will in a great measure banish Him from you. This will prevent the good influence of the word and ordinances of God to the causing of grace to flourish in you. It will be a great obstacle to their good effect. It will be like an ulcer within a man, which, while it remains, will keep him weak and lean, though you feed him with ever so wholesome food, or feast him ever so daintily.

3. If you have been left to fall into great sin, perhaps this was the occasion of it. If you have been left greatly to wound your own souls, perhaps this was what made way for it, that you allowed yourselves in some way of sin. A man who doth not avoid every sin, and is not universally obedient, cannot be well guarded against great sins. The sin in which he lives will be always an inlet, an open door, by which Satan from time to time will find entrance. It is like a breach in your fortress through which the enemy may get in and find his way to you greatly to hurt and wound you. If there be any way of sin which is retained as an outlet to corruption, it will be like a breach in a dam, which, if it be let alone, and be not stopped, will grow bigger and wider, and will endanger the whole. If any way of sin be lived in, it will be like Gideon's ephod, which was a snare to him and his house.

4. If you live very much in spiritual darkness, and without the comfortable presence of God, it may be this is the cause. If you complain that you have but little sweet communion with God, that you seem to be left and deserted of God, that God seems to hide his face from you, and but seldom gives you the sweet views of His glory and grace, that you seem to be left very much to grope in darkness, and to wander in a wilderness, perhaps you have wondered what is the matter. You have cried to God

often, that you might have the light of his countenance, but He heareth you not, and you have sorrowful days and nights upon this account. But if you have found, by what hath been said, that you live in some way of sin, it is very probable that is the cause, that is the root of your mischief, that is the Achan, the troubler that offends God, and causes Him to withdraw, and brings so many clouds of darkness upon your souls. You grieve the Holy Spirit by the way in which you live, and that is the reason that you have no more comfort from Him.

Christ hath promised, that He will manifest himself to His disciples; but it is upon the condition, that they keep His commands: **“He that hath my commandments, and keepeth them he it is that loveth me, and he that loveth me, shall be loved of my Father, and, I will love him, and will manifest myself to him”** (John 14:21). But if you habitually live in disobedience to any of the commandments of Christ, then it is no wonder that He doth not give you the comfortable manifestations of Himself. The way to receive the special favours of God, and to enjoy comfortable communion with Him, is to walk closely with Him.

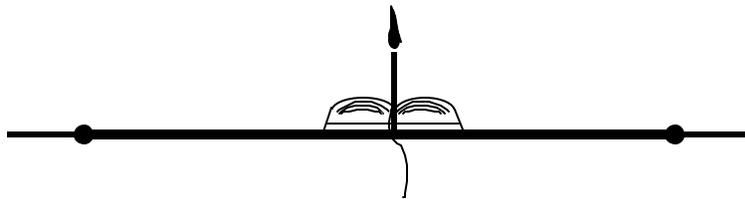
5. If you have been long doubting about your condition, perhaps this is the cause. If persons be converted, the most likely way to have the evidences of it clear, and to have the Spirit of God witnessing with our spirits, that we are the children of God, is to walk closely with God. This, as we have observed already, is the way to have grace in a flourishing state in the soul; it is the way to have the habits of grace strengthened, and the exercises of it lively. And the more lively the exercises of grace are, the more likely will they be to be seen. Besides, this is the way to have God manifesting Himself to us, as our Father and our friend, to have the manifestations and inward testimonies of His love and favour. But if you live in some way of sin, it is no wonder if that greatly darkens your evidences, as it keeps down the exercises of grace, and hides the light of God’s countenance. And it may be that you never will come to a comfortable resolution of that point, whether you be converted or not, until you shall have wholly forsaken the way of sin in which you live.

6. If you have met with the frowns of Providence, perhaps this has been the cause. When you have met with very sore rebukes and chastisements, that way of sin hath probably been your troubler. Sometimes God is exceedingly awful in his dealings with his own people in this world, for their sins. Moses and Aaron were not suffered to enter into Canaan, because they believed not God, and spake unadvisedly with their lips, at the waters of Meribah. And how terrible was God in his dealings with David! What affliction in his family did He send upon him! One of his sons ravishing his sister, another murdering his brother, and having expelled his father out of his kingdom, openly in the sight of all Israel, and in the sight of the sun, defiling his father’s concubines on the top of the house, and at last coming to a miserable end. Immediately after this followed the rebellion of Sheba and he had this uncomfortable circumstance attending the

end of his life, that he saw another of his sons usurping the crown. How awfully did God deal with Eli, for living in the sin of not restraining his children from wickedness! He killed his two sons in one day; brought a violent death upon Eli himself; took the ark from him, and sent it into captivity; cursed his house for ever, and swore that the iniquity of his house should not be purged with sacrifice and offering for ever; that the priesthood should be taken from him, and given to another family and that there should never be an old man in his family. Is not some way of sin in which you live the occasion of the rebukes of Providence which you have met with? True, it is not the proper business of your neighbours to judge you with respect to events of Providence; but you yourselves ought to inquire, wherefore God is contending with you (see Job 9:10).

7. If death be terrible to you, perhaps this is the foundation of it. When you think of dying, you find you shrink back at the thought. When you have any illness, or when there is any thing which seems any way to threaten life, you find you are affrighted by it, the thoughts of dying, and going into eternity, are awful to you, and that although you entertain a hope that you are converted. If you live in some way of sin, probably this is very much the foundation of it. This keeps your minds sensual and worldly, and hinders a lively sense of heaven and heavenly enjoyments. This keeps grace low, and prevents that relish of heavenly enjoyments which otherwise you would have. This prevents your having the comfortable sense of the divine favour and presence; and without that no wonder you cannot look death in the face without terror. The way to have the prospect of death comfortable, and to have undisturbed peace and quiet when we encounter death, is, to walk closely with God, and to be undefiled in the way of obedience to the commands of God; and that it is otherwise sometimes with truly godly persons, is doubtless frequently owing to their living in ways displeasing to God.

8. If you find by these things which have been proposed to you, that you have lived in a way of sin, consider that if you henceforward live in the same way, you will live in known sin. Whether in time past it have been known sin or not, though you may have hitherto lived in it through ignorance or inadvertence; yet if now you be sensible of it, henceforward, if you continue in it still, it will not be a sin of ignorance, but you will be proved to be of that class of men who live in ways of known sin.



A Study in Psalms: Psalm 66:13-20



Psalm 66 (cont.) - “Shout with Joy to God, All the Earth”

For the director of music.
A song. A psalm.

¹³I will come to Your temple with burnt offerings
and fulfill my vows to You—

¹⁴Vows my lips promised
and my mouth spoke when I was in trouble.

¹⁵I will sacrifice fat animals to You
and an offering of rams;

I will offer bulls and goats. *Selah*

¹⁶Come and listen, all you who fear God;
let me tell you what He has done for me.

¹⁷I cried out to Him with my mouth;
His praise was on my tongue.

¹⁸If I had cherished sin in my heart,
the Lord would not have listened;

¹⁹But God has surely listened
and heard my voice in prayer.

²⁰Praise be to God, who has not rejected my prayer
or withheld His love from me!

As we mentioned in the previous issue, the author of this psalm has been exhorting praise, from the macro to the micro. First (in vss. 1-7), he exhorts the whole earth to praise God: **“Shout with joy to God, all the earth!”** (vs. 1). Later (in vss. 8-12), he exhorts specifically God’s people to praise Him: **“Praise our God, O peoples, let the sound of His praise be heard”** (vs. 8). Here in the final section (vss. 13-20), the psalmist himself praises God for what God has done for him personally.

He begins: **“I will come to Your temple with burnt offerings and fulfill my vows to You—Vows my lips promised and my mouth spoke when I was in trouble. I will sacrifice fat animals to You and an offering of rams; I will offer bulls and goats”** (vss. 13-15). Since God is a holy God, praise to Him cannot be effective without first taking care of

sins against Him, and obligations owed Him. In the Old Testament law, God provided a system offerings and sacrifices to atone for sin, so the Psalmist begins his personal praise to God: **“I will come to Your temple with burnt offerings.”** Since the time of Christ, our burnt offering is Jesus. He paid the price for our sins. “Never attempt to come before God without Jesus, the divinely promised, given, and accepted burnt offering” [Spurgeon].

After taking care of his sin, the psalmist speaks of taking care of obligations owed God: **“...and fulfill my vows to You—Vows my lips promised and my mouth spoke when I was in trouble”** (vss. 13–14). It certainly must be true that the great majority of vows to God are made **“when we are in trouble.”** “It is very common, when we are under the pressure of any affliction, or in the pursuit of any mercy, to make vows and solemnly to speak them before the Lord, to bind ourselves out from sin and bind ourselves more closely to our duty” [Henry]. It is a natural tendency when in trouble to promise God something in exchange for getting you out of trouble—as if God needed your payment to do His work. Be very careful when making vows to God: you are absolutely bound to any vow made to God. I would say avoid them. Our God of love does not need to be paid for His works of grace. However, I do believe some vows are appropriate. There may be times when the Holy Spirit brings you to a place where you will be led by Him to make a vow, so as to bind you closer to the will and service of God.

The Psalmist’s praise for God overflows into his life, so that he wants to tell others about the goodness of God: **“Come and listen, all you who fear God; let me tell you what He has done for me”** (vs. 16). “We should take all occasions to tell one another of the great and kind things, which God has done for us” [Henry].

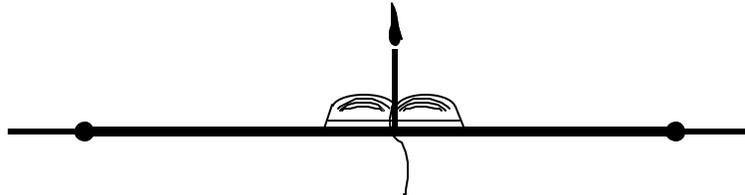
In this case, the Psalmist is telling others about and praising God for answered prayer: **“I cried out to Him with my mouth; His praise was on my tongue”** (vs. 17). The Psalmist tells of a time of trouble, when he **“cried out to [God] with [his] mouth”**. Yet, though he was in need of prayer, notice that the Psalmist maintained his attitude of praise: **“His praise was on my tongue.”** “It is well when prayer and praise go together” [Spurgeon].

The Psalmist was praying for a righteous cause: **“If I had cherished sin in my heart, the Lord would not have listened”** (vs. 18). Prayer is not mindless magic. Rather, it is interaction between intelligent beings. God listens to prayer, and considers the petitions of the one who prays. Being a holy God, of course, He cannot grant evil petitions.

God’s attention is real, and personal: **“But God has surely listened and heard my voice in prayer”** (vs. 19). God is a sentient being, who **“listens”** and **“hears”**. Some people deny a personal God. They imagine God as some sort of senseless spirit. Such thinking is folly. The mere fact that we ourselves have ears to hear and eyes to see implies that our Crea-

tor hears and sees. As another Psalmist points out elsewhere: **“Does He who implanted the ear not hear? Does He who formed the eye not see?”** (Ps. 94:9).

The Psalmist ends with an expression of praise for answered prayer: **“Praise be to God, who has not rejected my prayer or withheld His love from me!”** (vs. 20). We should certainly feel obligated to praise God, after He, the Lord of the Universe, has chosen, in His love, to answer our prayers. “What we win by prayer, we must wear with praise” [Henry]. Let us never forget that God is not obliged to answer our prayers. It is an expression of **“His love”**, and His mercy, that He does so. “There is no more proper ground of praise than the fact that God hears prayer—the prayer of poor, ignorant, sinful, dying men. When we consider how great is His condescension in doing this; when we think of His greatness and immensity; when we reflect that the whole universe is dependent on Him, and that the farthest worlds need His care and attention; when we bear in mind that we are creatures of a day and know nothing; and especially when we remember how we have violated His laws, how sensual, corrupt, and vile our lives have been, how low and groveling have been our aims and purposes, how we have provoked Him by our unbelief, our ingratitude, and our hardness of heart—we can never express, in appropriate words, the extent of His goodness in hearing our prayers, nor can we find language which will properly give utterance to the praises due to His name for having condescended to listen to our cries for mercy” [A. Barnes].



Concerning blessings from answered prayer: “If God did not by a very visible liberality confer these on some of those persons who ask for them, we should say that these good things were not at His disposal; and if He gave them to all who sought them, we should suppose that such were the only rewards of His service; and such a service would make us not godly, but greedy rather, and covetous.”

-- Augustine

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Two Groups of People

"There is a state of grace (Rom. 5:1), and a state of wrath (Eph. 2:3). The world is made up of receivers of Christ, or rejecters of Him, true subjects to God, or rebels against Him. There are two families: the family of God, and the family of the devil. The visible Church was not without its distinction; the Ark contains unclean as well as clean beasts; there is a Cain in Adam's family, a Ham in Noah's Ark, an Ishmael in Abraham's house, and a Judas in our Savior's retinue; and at the last day, the whole world will be distinguished into only two kinds, of sheep and goats. 'Tis necessary therefore to inquire whose we are, whether we belong to the God of Heaven, or the god of this world; whether we have the renewed image of God, or still retain the old stamp of the devil."

-- Stephen Charnock (1628- 1680)

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