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

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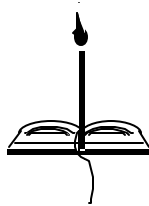
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Old Testament Study: Exodus

Pharaoh's Compromises, pt. 1 by Arthur W. Pink (1886-1952)

Our plan in this series of papers is not to furnish a verse by verse exposition of the book of Exodus, but rather to treat its contents topically, singling out the more important incidents and concentrating our attention upon them. The most serious disadvantage of this method is, that after we have followed out one topic to its conclusion, we are obliged to retrace our steps to begin a new one. Yet, perhaps, this is more than offset by the simplicity of the present plan and by the help afforded the reader to remember, substantially, the contents of this second book of Scripture. It is much easier to fix details in the mind when they are classified and conveniently grouped. Having gone over the ten plagues, we are now to contemplate the effect which they had upon Pharaoh. This will require us to go back to the earlier chapters. In the course of the revelation which Jehovah made to Moses at the burning bush, we find Him saying, **“And thou shalt come, thou and the elders of Israel, unto the king of Egypt, and ye shall say unto him, The Lord God of the Hebrews hath met with us; and now let us go, we beseech thee, three days’ journey into the wilderness, that we may sacrifice to the Lord our God”** (Ex. 3:18, AV). And while Moses was responding to the Divine call, the Lord said unto him again, **“When thou goest to return into Egypt, see that thou do all these wonders before Pharaoh, which I have put in thine hand; but I will harden his heart, that he shall not let the people go. And thou shalt say unto Pharaoh, Thus saith the Lord, Israel is My son, even My firstborn; And I say unto thee, Let my son go, that he may serve Me”** (Ex. 4:21-23, AV). In this last-quoted scripture the Lord furnished a reason why He desired His people to go into the wilderness to serve Him — **“Israel is My son, My firstborn.”** Two truths were here enunciated. To Israel pertained **“the adoption”** (see Romans 9:4). This adoption was not individual (as with us), but as a nation. The use of this term denoted that Israel had been singled out as the objects of God’s special favors — **“I am a Father to Israel, and Ephraim is My firstborn”** (Jeremiah 31:9). The title of **“firstborn”** speaks of dignity and excellency (see Genesis 49:3; Psalm 89:27). Israel will yet occupy the chief place among the nations, and be no more the *tail*, but the *head*. The place of the **“firstborn”**, then, is that of honor and privilege. To the firstborn belonged a double portion.

The terms of this demand upon Pharaoh call for careful consideration. First, God had said that His people must go a three days’ journey into the wilderness that they might **“sacrifice to the Lord their God”** (Ex. 3:18).

Then the Lord added, **“that he”** (His **“firstborn”**) **“may serve Me”** (Ex. 4:23). Finally, when Moses and Aaron delivered their message unto Egypt’s king, we find them, saying, **“Thus saith the Lord God of Israel, Let My people go that they may hold a feast unto Me in the wilderness”** (Ex. 5:1). The order of these three statements is very significant. The thought of **“sacrifice”** comes first. This is required to avert God’s judgment. Only as the sinner places blood between himself and the thrice holy God, can he stand in His august presence. Nothing but simple faith in an accomplished atonement enables the heart to be quiet before Him. **“Without shedding of blood is no remission”** (Hebrews 9:22). Following this, comes service. None can serve God acceptably till they are reconciled to Him. **“Whose I am, and whom I serve”** (Acts 27:23) is the Divine order. Following this, comes **“the feast”**, which speaks of fellowship and gladness. But this cannot be until the will is broken and the **“yoke”** has been received — for this is what true service implies. These three things, in the same beautiful order are strikingly illustrated in connection with the Prodigal Son. First the wayward one was reconciled, then he took his proper place — **“make me as one of Thy hired servants”**; and then came the feasting, over the **“fatted calf”**.

When God’s demand was first presented to Pharaoh, the king repulsed it in most haughty fashion; **“And Pharaoh said, Who is the Lord, that I should obey His voice to let Israel go? I know not the Lord, neither will I let Israel go”** (Ex. 5:2). How the *enmity* of the carnal mind is evidenced here! How the awful depravity of the unregenerate heart was displayed! The natural man knows not the Lord, neither does he hear or heed His voice. And, too, can we not clearly discern here the Arch-rebel, the **“god of this world”**, whom Pharaoh so strikingly adumbrated? Surely we can; and as we shall yet see, this is by no means the only trace of the Adversary’s footprints which are to be detected on the face of this record.

The answer of God to this defiant refusal of Pharaoh was to visit his land with sore judgments. As pointed out in previous articles, the first three plagues fell upon Israel as well as the Egyptians. But in the fourth God said, **“I will sever in that day the land of Goshen, in which My people dwell, that no swarms of flies shall be there”** (Exodus 8:22). This seems to have deeply impressed the king, for now, for the first time, he pays attention to Jehovah’s demand.

1. **“And Pharaoh called for Moses and Aaron and said, Go ye, sacrifice to your God in the land”** (Ex. 8:25). At first sight it would appear that at last Pharaoh was amenable to reason, recognizing the futility of fighting against the Almighty. But a closer glance at his words will show that he was far from being ready to comply with Jehovah’s requests. God’s command was couched in no uncertain terms. It called for the complete separation of His people unto Himself. Three things made this clear. First, **“The God of the Hebrews”** said Moses, **“hath met with us”** (Ex. 5:3). This title always calls attention to the separate character of His people (cf. Ex. 9:1; 9:13; Ex. 10:3). Second, **“Let us go three days’ journey”**. From Genesis onwards, the third day speaks of resurrection. God would have His people completely delivered from the land of darkness and death. Third, **“Let My people go, that they may hold a feast unto Me in the wilderness”**, that is, apart from Egypt, which speaks of the

world. Only one sacrifice was offered to the Lord in Egypt, namely, The Passover, and that was to deliver from death in Egypt; all others were reserved for the tabernacle in the wilderness.

The original response of Pharaoh was, **“Wherefore do ye, Moses and Aaron, hinder the people from their work? Get you unto your burdens”** (Ex. 5:4). As another has said, This is “typical of the world’s attitude towards spiritual service. The ‘burdens of Egypt’ are far more important than the service of the Lord, and even among the Lord’s people Martha finds more imitators than Mary, so much of Egypt do we all carry with us”. But now, when the fifth plague fell upon Egypt, Pharaoh said, **“Go ye, sacrifice to your God in the land”** (Ex. 8:25). The Lord had said, **“A three days’ journey into the wilderness.”** Pharaoh temporized. He grants Israel permission to worship their God; he does not insist that they bow down to his; but he suggests there is no need for them to be extreme: **“sacrifice to your God in the land”**.

This proffer was very subtle and well calculated to deceive one who was not acquainted with the character of God. “It might with great plausibility and apparent force, be argued: Is it not uncommonly liberal on the part of the king of Egypt to offer you toleration for your peculiar mode of worship? Is it not a great stretch of liberality to offer your religion a place on the public platform? Surely you can carry on your religion here as well as other people. There is room for all. Why this demand for separation? Why not take common ground with your neighbors? There’s no need, surely, for such extreme narrowness.” (C.H.M.)

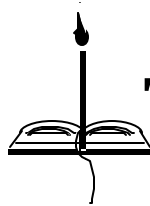
Writing to the Corinthians, the apostle said, **“We are not ignorant of his (Satan’s) devices”** (2 Corinthians 2:11, AV). Nor need any Christian be with the Word of Truth in his hands. One merciful reason why God has given to us the Scriptures is to inform us of Satan’s wiles, uncover his subtlety and expose his methods of attack. They are to be sought not only in those verses where he is referred to by name, but also in passages where he is only to be discovered working behind the scenes. Referring to some incidents in the history of Israel, the apostle declared, **“Now all these things happened unto them for types; and they are written for our admonition”** (1 Corinthians 10:11, AV). In the light of these scriptures, then, we are fully justified in regarding these compromises of Pharaoh as samples of the temptations which the Devil now brings to bear upon the people of God.

“Sacrifice to your God in the land”, that is, Egypt. And Egypt represents the world. But God’s people have been delivered **“from this present evil world”** (Galatians 1:4). Said the Lord to His apostles, **“Ye are not of this world, but I have chosen you out of the world”** (John 15:19). And again, **“They are not of the world, even as I am not of the world”** (John 17:14). **“The friendship of the world is enmity with God”** (James 4:4), how then can believers worship God **“in the land”**? They cannot. God must be worshipped **“in spirit and in truth”** (John 4:24), and to worship God **“in spirit”** means to worship Him through the new nature. It means to take our place, by faith, outside of the world which crucified the Son of God. It means **“going forth without the camp, bearing His reproach”** (Hebrews 13:13). It means being sepa-

rated, in spirit, from all that is of the flesh. This is just what Satan hates. He aims to get the believer to mix the world and the church. Alas! how well he has succeeded. Professing Christians have, for the most part, so assimilated their worship to Egyptian patterns, that instead of being hated by the world, they have taught the men of the world to join in with them. Thus far has the offense of the cross ceased. Of few indeed can it now be said, **“the world knoweth us not, because it knew Him not”** (1 John 3:1).

Insidious was Pharaoh’s proposal. Moses was not deceived by it. His answer was prompt and uncompromising: **“And Moses said, It is not meet so to do; for we shall sacrifice the abomination of the Egyptians to the Lord our God: lo, shall we sacrifice the abomination of the Egyptians before their eyes and will they not stone us?”** (Ex. 8:26). It is not meet or proper for God’s people to worship Him in the midst of His enemies: **“Come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord”** (2 Corinthians 6:17) has ever been His demand. Moreover, to worship God **“in the land”** would be to **“sacrifice the abomination of the Egyptians”**. Light is thrown upon this expression by what we are told in Genesis 46:34 — **“For every shepherd is an abomination unto the Egyptians”**. If every **“shepherd”** was an abomination to the Egyptians, certainly to present a lamb in sacrifice to God would be equally abominable to them. Nor have things changed since then. Christ crucified — which condemns the flesh, and makes manifest the total depravity of man — is still a **“stumbling-block”**. Again; **“shall we sacrifice the abomination of the Egyptians before their eyes, will they not stone us?”** Press upon men the Divine need of the Cross — God’s judgment of sin (Romans 8:3) ; announce that by the Cross of Christ believers are crucified to the world (Galatians 6:14), and the world’s enmity is at once aroused. Said the Lord Jesus, **“If ye were of the world, the world would love his own; but because ye are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you. Remember the word that I said unto you, The servant is not greater than his Lord. If they have persecuted Me, they will also persecute you; if they have kept My saying, they will keep yours also”** (John 15:19, 20).

One more reason Moses gave why he would not accept Pharaoh’s proposal; **“We will go three days’ journey into the wilderness and sacrifice to the Lord our God, as He shall command us”** (Ex. 8:27). Here Moses reveals the real point of the Enemy’s attack — it was the Word of God which he sought to neutralize. The Lord had said **“in the wilderness”**. To have worshipped God **“in the land”** would, therefore, have been rank disobedience. When God has spoken, that settles the matter. No room is left for debating or reasoning. It is vain for us to discuss and dispute. Our duty is to submit. The Word itself must regulate our worship and service, as well as everything else. Human opinions, human traditions, custom, convenience, have nothing to do with it. Divine revelation is our only Court of Appeal.



A Classic Study: The Value of a Good Name

A Classic Study by Richard Greenham (1531–1591)

[Here we begin a study by the esteemed servant of God, Richard Greenham.]—*Ed.*

Of a Good Name, pt. 1

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

All that is to be desired of a man is this, that he be virtuous, godly, and truly religious. Because it is in itself most excellent and most contrary to our nature, therefore the Scripture uses many arguments and reasons to persuade us thereunto: as in this place where the Wiseman would stir us up to the love of virtue, by setting before our eyes two principal effects and fruits, which we may receive by it. The first of these is a good name; the second is loving favour: both which as they do proceed for virtue and godliness, so they do maintain and increase one another. For as a man finds favor with those that do speak and report well of him, so those that will show a man loving favor will, or at least ought to show it in this, that they may willingly afford him a good report. Now both these are preferred before great riches, both these are accounted better than gold and much silver: and surely whoever is truly wise will make this account of them.

Whosoever doth rightly know to discern what is good, he will first and especially labor for them, for a good name doth commend us to God and to His holy angels, in whose eyes those virtues whereof a good name doth arise, are most acceptable. But riches are not able to do this. No, the abundance of silver and gold is often an occasion of sin, whereby we are most out of favour of God. Again, whereas riches (especially if they be evil gotten) do cause men many times to hate us, this good name and loving favour doth win the hearts of many, yea it does sometimes cause our enemies to be at peace with us. And this even hath been and ever will be most certain and true, whether we look to prosperity or adversity, whether we look to the common callings of this life, or the calling of the church. For such is the corruption of man's nature, that naturally do not love the Mag-

istrates, that God has placed over them: but when the Magistrates hath gotten a good report by the due execution of justice, by his pitiful dealing with the poor, and by his fatherly favor to all that be good, then will his subjects love him, then will they embrace him, then will they willingly commit their matters into his hands, and then will they with faithful and friendly hearts cleave and stick fast with him. To be short, that Lawyer that has the most clients, that Physician hath the most patients, and that Merchant that has the most customers, whose virtuous and godly dealings have gotten them from a good report.

In the callings of the Church this also is true: for if any preacher by the faithful discharge of his duty, and by his godly life, have once gotten the favour and friendship of men, how gladly will men hear him, how quietly will they be ruled by him, in what simplicity will they make known their griefs unto him, and careful will they be to procure his good. The schoolmaster also that hath the name of learning to teach, of discretion to rule, of godliness to train up his followers in the fear of God, he never wants scholars, but the most and best men of all will flock to him. Contrary, if any of those be discredited through any evil name, if the Magistrate be named an oppressor or a tyrant, the Lawyer be reported to deal deceitfully, if the Minister be corrupted either in doctrine or life, if the Schoolmaster be once known to be insufficient in learning, unwise in government, profane and of no religion, then will all men be afraid to have any dealing with them.

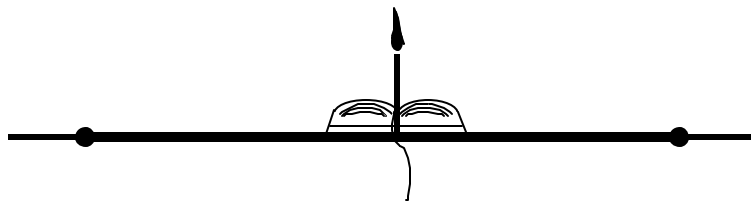
Those things are often found true in peace or prosperity: but in adversity, as in the time of war, in the time of sickness, and in the time of want and poverty, then be found most true. Will not all the poor community in the time of war, seek some aide at their Magistrate, who in the time of peace did good unto them? Nay rather will they not all with one consent come together, to help and defend them even with all their might, and with life itself, seeing that he hath used all good means to save and defend their lives? Contrary, how many Kings, how many Captains, how many Magistrates, have even in their greatest need been left and forsaken of their subjects and soldiers, because they have too sharply and unmercifully ruled them? And which is more than this, the subjects have even procured the death of their princes, the soldiers have laid violent hands upon their captains, and the tenants have been the first that have fought the death of their landlords, because no pity, no compassion, no freindship and loving favor have been shown to them. Again, if Magistrate, minister, master, or any other man by executing the duties of love, have won the hearts of the people, and gotten a good name among them, then in his sickness they

will pray for him, they will visit him, they will bear with him a part of his grief. Again, what can be more comfortable to a man then this is?

This will glad him at the heart, and this will turn his bed in his sickness. In poverty also his is soonest and most helped which has the best name, and has obtained through virtue most favor with men. For good men do consider their own case in him, and therefore are most ready to help him: yea even the evil and ungodly men, although they bear him no great good will, yet they are forced to help him, partly because his godly life doth witness to their souls, that he doth deserve to be helped, and partly because the Lord doth turn their hearts to favor him. The widow therefore that came to Elijah for help, used this argument to persuade Elijah, **“O man of God, my husband is dead, and died in debt, yet he feared God, therefore help I pray thee”** (see II Kings 4:1), seeing the creditors that come and immediately Elijah helped her.

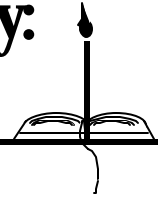
On the other side, if a man be evil reported of, if he be an adulterer, an Atheist, an idolator, a riotous person, or a man of hard dealing, and if such a one be once brought into some low estate, if he once fall into poverty, and need, then the hearts of men will shut up against him, no man will pity him, and all men will see and say his own sin is brought upon him. And this hath the testimony of the Prophets, who did often threaten such kind of punishments to ungodly men, so that no man should say, “Ah my father” or “Ah my mother”: but the whole city should be glad of their departure. This did the heathen people see in some part, and therefore all of them did greatly desire a good name: and as every one of them did excel in strength and courage, or in wit, or any kind of knowledge, so they did labor by that thing to get some credit to themselves.

And to conclude this point, though many great things in him, though a Magistrate do fear God greatly, though a minister be excellent in many points, though a Physician or Lawyer be skillful in their professions, yet if they have not a good name, they can do little good with their gifts. All this does teach us that indeed to be true which Solomon here says, that **“a good name is to be chosen above great riches, and loving favor above silver and gold.”**



New Testament Study:

Matthew 19:1-11



The Bond of Marriage

¹When Jesus had finished saying these things, He left Galilee and went into the region of Judea to the other side of the Jordan. ²Large crowds followed Him, and He healed them there.

³Some Pharisees came to Him to test Him. They asked, "Is it lawful for a man to divorce His wife for any and every reason?"

⁴"Haven't you read," He replied, "that at the beginning the Creator 'made them male and female,' ⁵and said, 'For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh'? ⁶So they are no longer two, but one. Therefore what God has joined together, let man not separate."

⁷"Why then," they asked, "did Moses command that a man give his wife a certificate of divorce and send her away?"

⁸Jesus replied, "Moses permitted you to divorce your wives because your hearts were hard. But it was not this way from the beginning. ⁹I tell you that anyone who divorces his wife, except for marital unfaithfulness, and marries another woman commits adultery."

¹⁰The disciples said to Him, "If this is the situation between a husband and wife, it is better not to marry."

¹¹Jesus replied, "Not everyone can accept this word, but only those to whom it has been given. ¹²For some are eunuchs because they were born that way; others were made that way by men; and others have renounced marriage because of the kingdom of heaven. The one who can accept this should accept it."

Jesus was once again on the move: **"When Jesus had finished saying these things, He left Galilee and went into the region of Judea to the other side of the Jordan. Large crowds followed Him, and He healed them there"** (vss. 1-2). Although, this seems like a typical transitional sentence of Matthew's, there is some significance here: Jesus is leaving Galilee, never to return, until after His resurrection. Much of His time of ministry and teaching was spent in Galilee. With His departure from there, we are moving on to the climax of the history of Jesus' life on earth, as Jesus makes His way to Jerusalem.

“Some Pharisees came to Him to test Him. They asked, ‘Is it lawful for a man to divorce His wife for any and every reason’” (vs. 3). These Pharisees **“came to Jesus”**; sadly, they came to Him for all the wrong reasons. They came to **“test Him”**, rather than to be ministered to by Him, rather than to learn from His great wisdom, rather than to be healed by Him, rather than to be saved by Him. “They came with a question, but they were not genuinely looking for information; they were *test-ing* Jesus, posing a question that they hoped He would not be able to answer satisfactorily” [Carson, 479]. You know you are far gone when you go to the Lord of the Universe, not to find answers, but to try to trip Him up.

Then as now, the Pharisees’s question on **“divorce”**, was a delicate and controversial question. It seems that any answer Jesus could give was bound to offend someone. Men would be offended if divorce was disallowed; women would be offended if divorce was too easy. Answering this question could even be dangerous, as John the Baptist found out. John was imprisoned (and eventually beheaded) because of his outspokenness with regard to King Herod’s marital situation (see Matt. 14:1–12).

It seems at that time, divorce was fairly prevalent, even among the Pharisees [Carson, 411]. For instance, Josephus the historian and Pharisee, who lived in the first century AD, was a divorcee. In fact, some of his comments on the law echo the question found here by the Pharisees. Josephus wrote: “He that desires to be divorced from his wife for any cause whatsoever (and many such causes happen among men), let him in writing give assurance that he will never use her as his wife any more” [Antiq. IV, 253]. Today, sadly, we have the same attitude about marriage, even within the church. Divorce is by and large accepted, even approved, for any and every reason. One could even imagine, if Jesus were walking the earth today, the same question being asked of Him.

So, what did Jesus say? He answered: **“‘Haven’t you read,’ He replied, ‘that at the beginning the Creator “made them male and female,” and said, “For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh”?’ So they are no longer two, but one. Therefore what God has joined together, let man not separate”**” (vss. 4–6). On matters of the Law, Jesus always referred to the Old Testament. “Let those who reverence the authority of Christ mark the divine authority which He ascribes to the Old Testament in general, and to the books of Moses in particular, in the settlement of all questions of divine truth and human duty” [JFB]. “Jesus refers to the account in Genesis as historical fact and bases His argument on literal expressions found therein” [Thomas, 278].

Here, Jesus cites as authority the earliest mention of marriage in the Bible. “If the sanctity of the marriage-tie, as the fountain of all social well-

being, is to be upheld among men, it must be by basing it on the original divine institution of it" [JFB]. The essence of biblical marriage is that God Himself, the **"Creator"**, has **"made them male and female"**, and once **"united"** by marriage, the **"Creator"** makes them **"one flesh"**. With this view, to divorce would be equivalent to and as radical as ripping your arm off your body, for man and wife are **"one flesh"**. Jesus underscores this: **"So they are no longer two, but one. Therefore what God has joined together, let man not separate"** (vs. 6). Marriage, then, in its Godly ideal, is indissoluble. "Jesus cites Scripture, then, to bring out the truth that marriage is more than a casual arrangement for the convenience of the two parties. It is the closest of earthly unities, and must be understood so" [Morris, 481]. "If God has joined them together, according to the structure of His own creation, divorce is not only 'unnatural' but rebellion against God" [Carson, 412].

The Pharisees follow up with another question: **"'Why then,' they asked, 'did Moses command that a man give his wife a certificate of divorce and send her away?'"** (vs. 7). The passage in Moses' law to which the Pharisees are referring is in Deuteronomy 24: **"When a man hath taken a wife, and married her, and it come to pass that she find no favor in his eyes, because he hath found some uncleanness in her: then let him write her a bill of divorcement, and give it in her hand, and send her out of his house. And when she is departed out of his house, she may go and be another man's wife. And if the latter husband hate her, and write her a bill of divorcement, and giveth it in her hand, and sendeth her out of his house; or if the latter husband die, which took her to be his wife; her former husband, which sent her away, may not take her again to be his wife, after that she is defiled; for that is abomination before the LORD: and thou shalt not cause the land to sin, which the LORD thy God giveth thee for an inheritance"** (Deut. 24:1-4, AV).

Jesus answers their question: **"Moses permitted you to divorce your wives because your hearts were hard. But it was not this way from the beginning. I tell you that anyone who divorces his wife, except for marital unfaithfulness, and marries another woman commits adultery"** (vss. 8-9). Jesus teaches us that the passage in Deuteronomy was not sanctioning divorce, but rather defining a procedure for divorce, should it occur. To divorce, a man must write a certificate of divorce. This certificate freed the wife to marry another man. The law also stipulated that the woman was not allowed to remarry the first man. This procedure was a protection for women. If the husband, through the hardness of his heart, divorced the woman for a trivial reason, she would be able to remarry without blame (assuming she was not guilty of marital unfaithfulness). "What the Pharisees call a command was only an allow-

ance, and designed rather to restrain the exorbitances of it than to give countenance to the thing itself. The Jewish doctors themselves observe such limitations in that law, that it could not be done without great deliberation. A particular reason must be assigned, the bill of divorce must be written, and, as a judicial act, must have all the solemnities of a deed, executed and enrolled. It must be given into the hands of the wife herself, and (which would oblige men, if they had any consideration in them, to consider) they were expressly forbidden ever to come together again" [Henry]

The Pharisees, as teachers of the Law, should have realized, through the study of other passages in the Old Testament writings, that the procedure proscribed by Moses was not a sanction of divorce. For instance, God clearly states: **"I hate divorce,' says the LORD God of Israel"** (Malachi 2:16). Jesus was "calling on His hearers to take seriously the Scripture that they professed to respect. If they did this they would realize that marriage was a much more binding relationship than they were making it. The typical attitude of the people of that time had reduced a God-given unity to a casual union, dissolvable at the whim of the male. This was not what Scripture meant when it spoke of what God did at the creation" [Morris, 482].

Jesus offers one and only one reason for divorce: **"I tell you that anyone who divorces his wife, except for marital unfaithfulness, and marries another woman commits adultery"** (vs. 9). The uniting in marriage of two into one flesh is tainted by marital unfaithfulness, for the unfaithful spouse becomes united with another. Jesus, therefore, releases the faithful spouse from the obligation of staying married, and allows that the faithful spouse may marry another without guilt.

Unfortunately, pre-marital sex, divorce, and even adultery are prevalent in today's society. One reason for this is that those of the world treat sex as just a physical act. However, the sexual union is not just a physical act. It is a mystical bond, forever uniting the participants. Thus, even pre-marital sex can be harmful to a future marriage, tainting the union of the married couple. We Christians must be an example to those of the world, and follow Jesus' instructions on sex and marriage. We must resist the temptation of joining in the sexual union before marriage. There are rewards to resisting this temptation. The eventual marriage bond is greatly strengthened by the faithfulness of both participants. There is no bond stronger—the uniting into one flesh by God—no love deeper than that of married spouses whose only life-long sexual partner is their spouse.

Given the irrevocability of the marriage vows, we must never enter into marriage lightly. Those who are planning to be married must understand clearly the permanence of marriage. "It is clear, from the whole tenor of the passage, that the relation of marriage ought to be highly rev-

erenced and honoured among Christians. It is a relation which was instituted in paradise, in the time of man's innocency, and is a chosen figure of the mystical union between Christ and His Church: it is a relation which nothing but death ought to terminate. It is a relation which is sure to have the greatest influence on those whom it brings together, for happiness or for misery, for good or for evil. Such a relation ought never to be taken in hand unadvisedly, lightly, or wantonly, but soberly, discreetly, and with due consideration" [Ryle, 235].

The disciples had a comment about this teaching of their Lord: **"The disciples said to Him, 'If this is the situation between a husband and wife, it is better not to marry'"** (vs. 10). "The remark made by our Lord's disciples shows the deplorably low state of public feeling on the subject" [Ryle, 234]. This comment by Jesus' disciples reflects that the ease of divorce was a relief to the men of the time. Clearly, they did not view marriage as a permanent bond. Moreover, if given the choice to accept the permanence of marriage, or to not marry, the disciples would choose not to marry.

The disciples, in a way, point out what all married people know: marriage is difficult; to stay married is a difficult thing; to live intimately with the same person for the rest of one's life requires constant acts of commitment. A good marriage is not so much a state of existence, as it is a series of chores to maintain the good marriage. A good marriage requires work on the part of both spouses. It is our Lord's command to stay married. And this we must do. It is a command for our good, and for the good of society. For us individually, there is nothing better and more stabilizing than having a permanent ally, a partner in love, someone to trust, to talk to, to pray with, to share life with. For society, it is well known that children raised in a stable family are more likely to become productive members of society.

Jesus replied to the disciples' remark: **"Jesus replied, 'Not everyone can accept this word, but only those to whom it has been given. For some are eunuchs because they were born that way; others were made that way by men; and others have renounced marriage because of the kingdom of heaven. The one who can accept this should accept it'"** (vs. 12). Jesus' reply to the disciples is, basically, if you can't accept that marriage is permanent, then don't get married. If you can accept it, then do get married. Marriage is optional. Some are **"born eunuchs"**, i.e. not made for marriage. Some **"have renounced marriage because of the kingdom of heaven"**, i.e., they have voluntarily decided not to get married in order to serve God more effectively.



A Topical Study: On Prayer

[Here we continue a series of studies on Prayer. This study by Jonathan Edwards, concerns our God being a God who hears our prayers.]—*Ed.*

The Most High a Prayer-Hearing God, pt. 2 by Jonathan Edwards (1703-1758)

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

[In this study, Mr. Edwards is explaining this verse in the following manner:

1. Show that the Most High is a God that hears prayer.
2. Show that He is eminently such a God.
3. Show that herein He is distinguished from all false gods.
4. Give the reasons of the doctrine.

In the previous issue, he handled items 1 and 2. We pick up here with item 3.]

III. Herein the most high God is distinguished from false gods. The true God is the only one of this character; there is no other of whom it may be said, that He heareth prayer.

Many of those things that are worshipped as gods are idols made by their worshippers, mere stocks and stones that know nothing. They are indeed made with ears, but they hear not the prayers of them that cry to them. They have eyes, but they see not, etc. (see Psalm 115:5, 6). — Others, though not the work of men's hands, yet are things without life. Thus, many worship the sun, moon, and stars, which, though glorious creations, yet are not capable of knowing anything of the wants and desires of those who pray to them. — Some worship certain kinds of animals, as the Egyptians were wont to worship bulls, which, though not without life, yet are destitute of that reason whereby they would be capable of knowing the requests of their worshippers. Others worship devils instead of the true God: **“But I say, that the things which the Gentiles sacrifice, they sacrifice to devils”** (1 Corinthians 10:20.) These, though beings of great

powers, have not knowledge necessary to capacitate them fully to understand the state, circumstances, necessities, and desires of those who pray to them. But the true God perfectly knows the circumstances of every one that prays to Him throughout the world. Though millions pray to Him at once, in different parts of the world, it is no more difficult for Him who is infinite in knowledge, to take notice of all than of one alone. God is so perfect in knowledge, that He doth not need to be informed by us in order to a knowledge of our wants, for He knows what things we need before we ask Him. The worshippers of false gods were wont to lift their voices and cry aloud, lest their gods should fail of hearing them, as Elijah tauntingly bid the worshippers of Baal do (see 1 Kings 18:27). But the true God hears the silent petitions of His people. He needs not that we should cry aloud; yea, He knows and perfectly understands when we only pray in our hearts, as Hannah did (see 1 Samuel 1:13).

Idols are but vanities and lies, in them is no help. As to power or knowledge, they are nothing; as the apostle says . **“An idol is nothing in the world”** (1 Corinthians 8:4). As to images, they are so far from having power to answer prayer, that they are not able to act, **“They have hands, and handle not; feet have they, but they walk not; neither speak they through their throat. They, therefore, that make them and pray to them, are senseless and sottish, and make themselves, as it were, stocks and stones, like unto them”** (Psalm 115:7,8) and in Jeremiah 10:5: **“They are upright as the palm tree, but speak not: they must needs be borne, because they cannot go. Be not afraid of them for they cannot do evil; neither also is it in them to do good.”** As to the hosts of heaven, the sun, moon, and stars, although mankind receives benefit by them, yet they act only by necessity of nature; therefore they have no power to do anything in answer to prayers. And devils, though worshipped as gods, are not able, if they had disposition, to make those happy who worship them, and can do nothing at all but by divine permission, and as subject to the disposal of Divine Providence.

When the children of Israel departed from the true God to idols, and yet cried to Him in their distress, He reprov'd them for their folly, by bidding them cry to the gods whom they had served, for deliverance in the time of their tribulation (see Joshua 10:14). So God challenges those gods themselves: **“Show the things that are to come hereafter, that we may know that ye are gods, yea, do good or do evil, that we may be dismayed and behold it together. Behold, ye are of nothing, and your work of nought, an abomination is He that chooseth you”** (Isaiah 12:23, 24) — These false gods, instead of helping those who pray to them cannot help themselves. The devils are miserable tormented spirits, they are bound in chains of darkness for their rebellion against the true God, and cannot deliver themselves. Nor have they any more disposition to help mankind than a parcel of hungry wolves or lions would have to pro-

tect and help a flock of lambs. And those that worship and pray to them get not their good-will by serving them: all the reward that Satan will give them for the service which they do Him, is to devour them. — I proceed now

IV. To give the reasons of the doctrine, which I would do in answer to these two inquiries: first, Why God requires prayer in order to the bestowment of mercies, and secondly, Why God is so ready to hear the prayers of men?

INQ. 1. Why doth God require prayer in order to the bestowment of mercies?

It is not in order that God may be informed of our wants or desires. He is omniscient, and with respect to His knowledge unchangeable. God never gains any knowledge by information. He knows what we want, a thousand times more perfectly than we do ourselves before we ask Him. For though, speaking after the manner of men, God is sometimes represented as if He were moved and persuaded by the prayers of His people; yet it is not to be thought that God is properly moved or made willing prayers; for it is no more possible that there should be any new inclination or will in God, than new knowledge. The mercy of God is not moved or drawn by anything in the creature; but the spring of God's beneficence is within himself only; He is self-moved; and whatsoever mercy He bestows, the reason and ground of it is not to be sought for in the creature, but in God's own good pleasure. It is the will of God to bestow mercy in this way, viz. in answer to prayer, when He designs beforehand to bestow mercy, yea, when He has promised it; as in Ezekiel 36:36,37: **"I the Lord have spoken it, and will do it. Thus saith the Lord, I will yet for this be inquired of by the house of Israel, to do it for them."** God has been pleased to constitute prayer to be antecedent to the bestowment of mercy, and He is pleased to bestow mercy in consequence of prayer, as though He were prevailed on by prayer. — When the people of God are stirred up to prayer, it is the effect of His intention to show mercy; therefore He pours out the spirit of grace and supplication.

There may be two reasons given why God requires prayer in order to the bestowment of mercy, one especially respects God, and the other respects ourselves.

1. With respect to God, prayer is but a sensible acknowledgment of our dependence on Him to His glory. As He hath made all things for His own glory, so He will be glorified and acknowledged by His creatures; and it is fit that He should require this of those who would be the subjects of His mercy. That we, when we desire to receive any mercy from Him, should humbly supplicate the Divine Being for the bestowment of that mercy, is but a suitable acknowledgment of our dependence on the power and mercy of God for that which we need, and but a suitable honour paid to the great Author and Fountain of all good.

2. With respect to ourselves, God requires prayer of us in order to the bestowment of mercy, because it tends to prepare us for its reception. Fervent prayer many ways tends to prepare the heart. Hereby is excited a sense of our need, and of the value of the mercy which we seek and at the same time earnest desires for it, whereby the mind is more prepared to prize it, to rejoice in it when bestowed, and to be thankful for it. Prayer, with suitable confession, may excite a sense of our unworthiness of the mercy we seek; and the placing of ourselves in the immediate presence of God, may make us sensible of His majesty, and in a sense fit to receive mercy of Him. Our prayer to God may excite in us a suitable sense and consideration of our dependence on God for the mercy we ask, and a suitable exercise of faith in God's sufficiency them so we may be prepared to glorify His name when the mercy is received.

INQ. II. Why is God so ready to hear the prayers of men. — To this I answer,

1. Because He is a God of infinite grace and mercy. It is indeed a very wonderful thing, that so great a God should be so ready to hear our prayers, though we are so despicable and unworthy: that He should give free access at all times to every one: should allow us to be importunate without esteeming it an indecent boldness, should be so rich in mercy to them that call upon Him, that worms of the dust should have such power with God by prayer; that He should do such great things in answer to their prayers, and should show himself, as it were, overcome by them. This is very wonderful, when we consider the distance between God and us, and how we have provoked Him by our sins, and how unworthy we are of the least gracious notice. It cannot be from any need that God stands in of us; for our goodness extendeth not to Him. Neither can it be from anything in us to incline the heart of God to us; it cannot be from any worthiness in our prayers, which are in themselves polluted things. But it is because God delights in mercy and condescension. He is herein infinitely distinguished from all other gods: He is the great fountain of all good, from whom goodness flows as light from the sun.

2. We have a glorious Mediator, who has prepared the way, that our prayers may be heard consistently with the honour of God's justice and majesty. Not only has God in himself mercy sufficient for this, but the Mediator has provided that this mercy may be exercised consistently with the divine honour. Through Him we may come to God for mercy; He is the way, the truth, and the life; no man can come to the Father but by Him. This Mediator hath done three things to make way for the hearing of our prayers.

(1.) He hath by His blood made atonement for sin; so that our guilt need not stand in the way, as a separating wall between God and us, and that our sins might not be a cloud through which our prayers cannot pass. By His atonement He hath made the way to the throne of grace open.

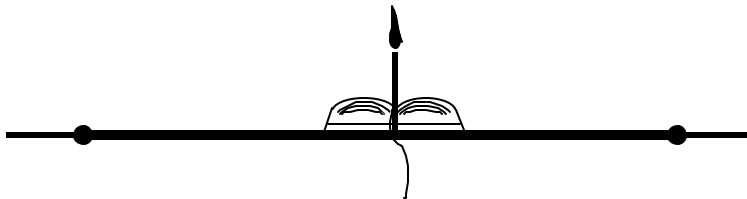
God would have been infinitely gracious if there had been no Mediator; but the way to the mercy-seat would have been blocked up. But Christ hath removed whatever stood in the way. The veil which was before the mercy-seat **“is rent from the top to the bottom,”** by the death of Christ. If it had not been for this, our guilt would have remained as a wall of brass to hinder our approach. But all is removed by His blood, Hebrews 10:17, etc.

(2.) Christ, by His obedience, has purchased this privilege, viz. that the prayers of those who believe in Him should be heard. He has not only removed the obstacles to our prayers, but has merited a hearing of them. His merits are the incense that is offered with the prayers of the saints, which renders them a sweet savour to God, and acceptable in His sight. Hence the prayers of the saints have such power with God; hence at the prayer of a poor worm of the dust God stopped the sun in its course for about the space of a whole day; hence Jacob as a prince had power with God, and prevailed. Our prayers would be of no account, and of no avail with God, were it not for the merits of Christ.

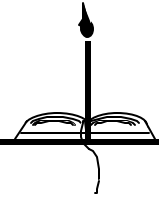
(3.) Christ enforces the prayers of His people, by His intercession at the right hand of God in heaven. He hath entered for us into the holy of holies, with the incense which He hath provided, and there He makes continual intercession for all that come to God in His name; so that their prayers come to God the Father through His hands, if I may so say; which is represented in Revelation 8:3,4. **“And another angel came and stood at the altar, having a golden censer, and there was given unto Him much incense, that He should offer it with the prayers of all the saints upon the golden altar, which is before the throne. And the smoke of the incense which came with the prayers of the saints, ascended up before God, out of the angel’s hand.”**

This was typified of old by the priest’s offering incense in the temple, at the time when the people were offering up their prayers to God; as Luke 1:10. **“And the whole multitude of the people were praying without at the time of incense.”**

(This study will continue in the next issue.)



A Study in Psalms: Psalm 68:7-14



Psalm 68:7-14 - God of Power, God of Grace

- ⁷When You went out before Your people, O God,
when You marched
through the wasteland, *Selah*
- ⁸The earth shook, the heavens poured down rain,
before God, the One of Sinai,
before God, the God of Israel.
- ⁹You gave abundant showers, O God;
You refreshed Your weary inheritance.
- ¹⁰Your people settled in it,
and from Your bounty, O God,
You provided for the poor.
- ¹¹The Lord announced the word,
and great was the company
of those who proclaimed it:
- ¹²“Kings and armies flee in haste;
in the camps men divide the plunder.
- ¹³Even while you sleep among the campfires,
the wings of [my] dove are sheathed with silver,
its feathers with shining gold.”
- ¹⁴When the Almighty scattered the kings
in the land,
it was like snow fallen on Zalmon.

We continue this psalm, in which David, presumably as he moves the Ark of the Covenant, is recounting the greatness of God's power and the greatness of His grace towards His people. In this section, David looks back at examples of God's grace in protecting His people. “Fresh mercies should put us in mind of former mercies and revive our grateful sense of them” [Henry].

David writes: **“When You went out before Your people, O God, when You marched through the wasteland, ...”** (vss. 7). David refers here to the exodus of the children of Israel from Egypt, when God literally

and physically **“went out before His people”** in the form of a cloud. The central event of the Old Testament is the redemption of His people out of Egypt. It is referred to over and over throughout the Old Testament when God’s grace to His people is spoken of. And this event points to and is a type of the central event of the New Testament (and human history), Christ’s redemption of humanity from the slavery of sin. “That one work of the church’s delivery out of Egypt, representing the redemption of His people from the misery of sin and Satan’s bondage, is a sufficient proof forever of the Lord’s love, care, power, and faithfulness, to deliver His own out of all their misery; which the church, and every member thereof, should always make use of unto the end of the world: whether we look upon that work in the type singly, or as it is a representation or pledge of the spiritual delivery of His people, this work we should often look upon, and still hold it up unto God” [Dickson, 398].

David continues: **“... The earth shook, the heavens poured down rain, before God, the One of Sinai, before God, the God of Israel”** (vs. 8). This refers to the time when God personally gave the Law to the children of Israel: **“On the morning of the third day there was thunder and lightning, with a thick cloud over the mountain, and a very loud trumpet blast. Everyone in the camp trembled. Then Moses led the people out of the camp to meet with God, and they stood at the foot of the mountain. Mount Sinai was covered with smoke, because the Lord descended on it in fire. The smoke billowed up from it like smoke from a furnace, the whole mountain trembled violently, and the sound of the trumpet grew louder and louder”** (Ex. 19:16–18). The giving of the Law was accompanied by an awesome display of God’s splendor and majesty. “In the works of the Lord it is needful not only to look upon that which may foster faith in God and love toward Him, but also to set before us what may serve to keep our hearts in fear and awe of His dreadful majesty” [Dickson, 399]. God knew that we would be more apt to keep His law if we had a sense of fear of Him. The fear of God is a good thing, keeping us on a straight path. Yes, we must know of the grace and goodness of God, but we must also understand His power, might and majesty. We must know of His ability to make the earth tremble, and to pour forth His judgment upon us.

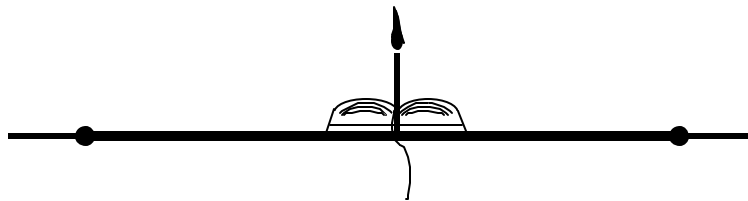
Certainly at times, God shows forth His power miraculously, but more often God provides and blesses His people in more ordinary ways, as David points out: **“You gave abundant showers, O God; You refreshed Your weary inheritance. Your people settled in it, and from**

Your bounty, O God, You provided for the poor” (vss. 9-10). “The ordinary sustaining of God’s people bodily and spiritually, in the possession of any benefit, temporal or spiritual, given unto them, should be observed, as well as the bestowing of any benefit in an extraordinary way, as here the ordinary sustaining of Israel in Canaan, is made a part of the song of praise, no less than their miraculous delivery out of the Egypt” [Dickson, 399].

When a nation turns to God, they are helped in a most important location: on the field of battle. God Himself speaks of this: **“The Lord announced the word, and great was the company of those who proclaimed it: ‘Kings and armies flee in haste; in the camps men divide the plunder. Even while you sleep among the campfires, the wings of my dove are sheathed with silver, its feathers with shining gold’”** (vss. 12-13). Then David adds: **“When the Almighty scattered the kings in the land, it was like snow fallen on Zalmon”** (vs. 14). God can turn the tide in battle by causing **“kings and armies to flee in haste.”** God even blesses His people as they **“sleep among the campfires.”** “The victory was due to the Almighty arm alone; He scattered the haughty ones who came against His people, and He did it as easily as snow is driven from the bleak sides of Zalmon” [Spurgeon].

In this world, we, even the people of God, are faced with great afflictions and trials. At times, we are locked in mortal combat. Skeptics may mock when they hear it, but trust me, when you go into battle, you want to do so with God on your side. There is a reason for all such trials. “The Lord will sometimes exercise His church with wars, afflictions, and trials, when He intendeth not to punish them, but to give them the victory over their enemies, and that for His own glory” [Dickson, 400].

(The study of this psalm will continue in the next issue, D.V.)



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Unexpected Answers to Prayer

"God's memorial is that He hears prayer, and His glory is that He answers it in a manner fitted to inspire awe in the hearts of His people... We do not always know what we are asking for when we pray; when the answer comes, the veritable answer, it is possible that we may be terrified by it. We seek sanctification, and trial will be the reply; we ask for more faith, and more affliction is the result; we pray for the spread of the gospel, and persecution scatters us. Nevertheless, it is good to ask on, for nothing which the Lord grants in His love can do us any harm. Terrible things will turn out to be blessed things after all, where they come in answer to prayer."

-- C. H. Spurgeon (1834-1892)

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