

To understand the principles of God's work

Exodus 4:2–9, 17

And the Lord said unto him, What is that in thine hand? And he said, A rod. And he said, Cast it on the ground. And he cast it on the ground, and it became a serpent; and Moses fled from before it. And the Lord said unto Moses, Put forth thine hand, and take it by the tail. And he put forth his hand, and caught it, and it became a rod in his hand: That they may believe that the Lord God of their fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, hath appeared unto thee. And the Lord said furthermore unto him, Put now thine hand into thy bosom. And he put his hand into his bosom: and when he took it out, behold, his hand was leprous as snow. And he said, Put thine hand into thy bosom again. And he put his hand into his bosom again; and when he took it out of his bosom, behold, it was turned again as his other flesh. And it shall come to pass, if they will not believe thee, neither hearken to the voice of the first sign, that they will believe the voice of the latter sign. And it shall come to pass, if they will not believe also these two signs, neither hearken unto thy voice, that thou shalt take of the water of the river, and pour it upon the dry land: and the water which thou takest out of the river shall become blood upon the dry land. ... And thou shalt take this rod in thine hand, wherewith thou shalt do signs.

We need to know that God works according to His fixed principles. For us who serve the Lord, if we are to be useful in His hands, we must understand the principles by which God works. Therefore, if we hope to become useful vessels in the Lord's hand, we have to know the principles of God's working.

I have met many brothers and sisters. I cannot say they do not pray, lack love, are without godliness, or have no spiritual gifts—they possess all these things. Yet God's work is scarcely manifested through them. This makes me realize there must be a reason. Later I discovered that many believers simply do not understand the principles of God's work.

For example, if we want a room filled with sunlight, it is not enough merely to open a window on the north side. We must also open windows toward the east, west

and south, so that the whole room may be filled with light. The more windows we open, the more light will stream in. On the contrary, if you long for light to come in yet refuse to open any window, no amount of prayer for light will be of any avail.

It is the same with God's work. We must walk according to His principles to receive His blessing. Otherwise, even the most earnest prayers and deepest piety will amount to nothing. Only when we have a clear understanding of God's working principles can we become servants fit for His use.

Through years of being led by the Lord, brothers and sisters can clearly see the principles by which He uses us in His work. There are at least several crucial points we must observe to serve the Lord well. Naturally, understanding these principles applies not only to our individual spiritual life, but also to co-workers and the church as a whole.

About seven or eight years ago, I was alone in my room meditating on this very question: what exactly are the principles of God's working? Strangely, as I meditated, it was as if a voice spoke to me: Go read Exodus chapters 3 and 4, concerning God's calling of Moses and how He used him.

I immediately turned to Exodus chapter 3, but received no special insight. When I read chapter 4, however, every verse shone with God's light. I dare not claim I received some extraordinary revelation, yet I can truly say I saw profound spiritual principles.

The Three Lessons Moses Learned

In the Old Testament, Moses is God's pattern servant; in the New Testament, Paul is God's pattern servant. Both the Old and New Testaments commend Moses as a faithful servant over all God's house. (Numbers 12:7, Hebrews 3:2.)

Spiritually speaking, the principle of Moses as a servant transcends the ages of the Old and New Covenants. His experience sets forth the fundamental principles for being a servant of God. We all know Moses' background, so I will not dwell on it here. He was raised in excellent circumstances, being the son of Pharaoh's daughter. He also had a heart to serve God, so he learned all the wisdom of the Egyptians to equip himself, hoping to deliver God's people.

Though God had ordained Moses to rescue Israel and lead them into the Promised Land, his sincerity, learning, eloquence, and natural abilities together were still

insufficient for serving God. Therefore, in His sovereignty, God arranged circumstances that forced Moses to flee into the wilderness of Sinai.

Being brought into the wilderness, Moses felt as if God had set him aside. Through those years in the wilderness, he lost all confidence in himself. (Exodus 3:11, cf. 2:11–13.) He even acknowledged that eighty years is the limit of a man’s lifetime. (Psalm 90:10.) In his own eyes, there seemed to be no more time, no more opportunity—he thought he would spend the rest of his life in the wilderness.

It was at the moment when he felt utterly useless that God came to call him, recorded in Exodus chapters 3 and 4. When God appeared to Moses in the burning bush and commissioned him for God’s work, Moses considered himself unworthy in every way. He excused himself as slow of speech and slow of tongue, so God prepared Aaron and Miriam to assist him.

Yet even in Exodus chapter 4, Moses still replied that the children of Israel “will not believe me, nor hearken unto my voice: for they will say, The Lord hath not appeared unto thee.” (v.1.) This shows Moses had not yet been stirred or touched by God’s calling.

For this reason, God revealed three miracles that followed, which became the authentic proof that Moses was truly called by God. Here God caused Moses to experience three things:

- His rod turned into a serpent;
 - His hand became leprous;
 - The river water turned into blood.
- (Exodus 4:2–9, 17.)

Originally, they were three useful things: a rod, flesh, and water; yet they were transformed into three harmful things: a serpent, leprosy, and blood.

1. The Lesson of the Rod Turning into a Serpent

Let us first consider the miracle of the rod turning into a serpent. For Moses, his rod was originally used mainly for shepherding, and later it would serve as his staff to lead the children of Israel out of Egypt. By this time Moses was already eighty years old, and the rod had become his reliance, something he absolutely depended on for his living.

Though we do not hold a physical rod in our hands, every one of us has something we rely on in life in principle. A merchant trusts his business and trade as his rod; a student leans on his studies and books as his rod; a wife looks to her husband as her “rod and support”. A rod stands for whatever we trust in, whatever we depend on to uphold our life.

We have many such rods: they may be our parents, education, career, wealth, and so on. In themselves, these rods are good and can even be used to serve God. Yet once we meet God face to face, we come to see that the very rod we live by must be cast down to the ground.

From my own calling and the calling of many other useful servants of God, we can clearly see: when a person is about to be used by the Lord, the first thing he must do is cast down the rod in his hand. As soon as the rod is cast down, the serpent hidden within it is exposed. The serpent was already in the rod all along, but only when the rod is laid down does it manifest itself and reveal its true nature.

This miracle reveals a spiritual truth: under God’s light and authority, the very thing you rely on is shown to be a serpent in its essence. From the very beginning, the serpent has always come in disguise. From the Old Testament all the way to the Book of Revelation, the serpent hides within, behind, or beneath many things, seeking to occupy and capture the men God created for His eternal purpose.

In Moses’ eyes, the rod was his precious reliance; but in God’s eyes, it was an embodiment of Satan, designed to hold him in bondage.

When Moses saw his rod turn into a serpent the moment he cast it down, he was filled with fear and fled away, daring not to touch it. Then the Lord told him to stretch out his hand and take it by the tail, and the serpent became a rod again in his hand.

For many years Moses had cherished this rod and trusted in it greatly. Only after casting it down did he realize it was actually a serpent that had held him captive all those years. He came to understand that what he had leaned on in the past was in reality something serpentine, something that harmed him spiritually.

Notice carefully: God did not tell Moses to abandon his rod forever, but to cast it down first, so that its true nature might be laid bare. Afterwards, God commanded Moses to take up what had become a serpent—by its tail.

There was a responsible brother in Nanjing who had once been a businessman. Later he saw how dangerous and worldly business could be and dared not engage in it any longer. But God’s will is not for us to cast it aside completely; it is for us to take

it the other way around. We still need to hold the rod, but we must hold it from a reversed position.

Once we centered our life on the rod; now we center our life on the Lord. Once we strove only for worldly living; now we labor diligently for the gospel.

In Shandong, an elderly brother once shared that his old friend's wife was like an old serpent, and his children were like little serpents. Bound and bitten by them, this brother could not freely serve the Lord or lay down his life for the gospel. Out of fear of the serpent, he dared not take up his responsibilities again.

Yet the Lord never tells us to cast down our rods and never pick them up again. It is easy simply to walk away: leave home, forsake wife, children, and all earthly ties to go preach the gospel in distant places. But this is not the Lord's way. He calls us to stretch forth our hands once more and take hold of the serpent's tail.

After the hidden serpent is exposed, we must then take it by the tail. This is the best way to deal with the serpent. If you seize its head, it will bite you; but if you take it from the tail, it loses its power and hangs helpless. In the end, it even becomes a rod of authority for you, no longer able to dominate or bind you. (Exodus 4:4, 17; Luke 10:19.) You can never walk in spiritual authority unless you take it by the tail.

The Gospels tell us that to follow the Lord, we must forsake father, mother, children, and all earthly relationships. (Matthew 19:29.) Yet in the Epistles, Paul commands us to love and honor our parents. (Ephesians 6:1–3.)

The forsaking spoken of in the Gospels is the casting down of our rod; the exhortation in Ephesians is the taking up again—taking the rod the Lord's way, from the reversed perspective. This very rod became a rod of divine authority. Later, when Moses performed miracles in Egypt and led Israel out of the land, it was by this rod that he walked in God's power.

Today in the church in Hong Kong, more than two hundred brothers and sisters have consecrated themselves to the Lord. I would say this is your first essential lesson: cast down all that you possess and all that you rely on, then take them up again by the tail under the Lord's sovereign hand.

2. The Lesson of Knowing Oneself

Then the Lord told Moses to put his hand into his bosom. He did so, and when he drew it out, his hand was leprous, as white as snow. This is the second lesson.

First, we must cast down the rod in our hand, expose the serpent's true nature, and then take it up again by the tail. Yet this alone is not enough; we still need the second lesson, just as Moses put his hand into his bosom and drew it forth leprous.

The bosom signifies what we are inwardly, and leprosy signifies sin.

(Romans 7:17–18.)

This reveals that in our flesh dwells no good thing. We must see ourselves as nothing and having nothing.

In the church, I often see brothers and sisters criticizing, judging, and blaming others. It grieves me deeply, for they do not know that within their own bosom is leprosy. If you truly know your own flesh, you will never dare to condemn another brother or sister. When you realize your own spiritual leprosy, you understand you are of the same fallen nature—corrupt and defiled within, just like everyone else.

Even our praise, love, and sympathy, if they spring merely from ourselves, are all tainted with this spiritual leprosy. In one of Newton's hymns, he wrote that he abhorred his own sin. Once a person truly sees and knows himself, he will no longer judge others casually, for he knows he has no standing to condemn God's children.

May the Lord forgive me to say this: every time I am tempted to criticize others, the Lord shows me my own leprosy, filthiness, and uncleanness. Then I realize that no matter how imperfect others may be, or how hurt I may feel, I have no right to judge at all.

We have no inherent qualification to be called by the Lord; it is only by God's grace that we are what we are.

(1 Corinthians 15:10.)

When we know ourselves in this way, we become submissive and humble. Only then can the spiritual leprosy of strife and judgment be removed among God's children in the church. We will have no discontent toward others, but only abhorrence toward our own sinful self.

Whoever truly sees his real condition will acknowledge that he is nothing but a manifestation of filth, decay, corruption, uncleanness, and sin. Apart from God's mercy, we are utterly unworthy to serve Him. Such insight will keep us walking in constant confession and prevailing prayer.

3. The Lesson of Knowing the World

If we would do God's work, we must not only recognize Satan's usurpation and the corruption of our own flesh, but also come to know the hateful nature of the world.

The third miracle God gave to Moses was this: "Take some water from the river and pour it on the dry land, and the water you take from the river will become blood on the ground."

The river here refers to the Nile, which watered the land of Egypt, typifying the fallen earthly pleasures of this world. Egypt itself is a type of the world. According to the Bible, Egypt was made rich and prosperous with abundant enjoyment because of the Nile. The Nile was the source of Egypt's life and livelihood, yet blood is a symbol of death.

Outwardly, the Nile brought provision and pleasure; but in God's eyes, it was death. When you see the world's people living in abundance and comfort, and compare it with your own lot, you may feel poor, needy and pitiful by contrast. This is especially true when you see former classmates who once did worse than you in school now prospering and enjoying great worldly blessings.

Yet when you see the water turned into blood, you realize that their luxury homes and fine cars are nothing but partaking of blood—the very symbol of spiritual death.

Once you see that what you rely on is a serpent, that within you is uncleanness, and that all around you is but blood and death, your heart will naturally be filled with loathing toward the world.

The Lord said, "Whoever drinks of the water that I shall give him will never thirst forever." (John 4:14.) Those who are thirsty and drink the water of the world can never be satisfied. Only the living water the Lord gives can satisfy the longing of the soul and supply all our needs for serving the Lord.

May we all keep these three spiritual principles firmly in our hearts.

Having Revelation Enables Us to Serve the Lord

These three fundamental lessons all boil down to one basic principle—seeing or not seeing. Once you truly see, you will naturally be separated from the world and from others.

Without God’s revelation, you only see a mere rod; you think your inner being is pure; you regard the river that supplies Egypt as nothing but ordinary water. But once you receive God’s revelation, your whole perspective changes. You will see that the rod in your hand is actually a serpent, your inner self is unclean, and the world is full of death.

Exodus chapter 4 is a chapter that contrasts God’s revelation with man’s natural viewpoint. Many people ask me, “How can I know I have God’s revelation?” The answer lies in whether you have seen that the rod is a serpent, that what comes out of your flesh is leprosy, and that the world’s water is blood.

Young people often have lofty ambitions and worldly dreams. I pray God will wake you up from such illusions. God not only caused Moses to experience and see these truths, but also sent him to the children of Israel to do the same, that others might see as well.

God commissioned Moses to deliver Israel, which seemed an overwhelming difficulty to Moses. Yet once God granted him revelation, his entire perception was transformed.

Let me use an illustration: suppose there is an earthworm hidden in this cup of water. Tonight, being thirsty, I drink it all, only to find the earthworm at the bottom. Tomorrow evening, when I am thirsty again and look at this cup, how will I feel? The thought of the earthworm will linger in my mind every time. This is what revelation does within us.

We once had no spiritual awareness, just as Moses held his rod day after day without discernment. But after the rod was turned into a serpent, Moses’ inner sense toward it was forever changed.

It is the same with our perception of the flesh. We must realize that sin is not merely out in the world—it dwells within us. Wickedness is not found only abroad; it resides in our own nature. Yet we once had no sense of it.

It was only when Moses pulled his hand out of his bosom and found it leprous that his eyes were opened. From then on, every time he looked at his hand, the reality of leprosy came to mind.

Some people pretend to be humble, weak, and submissive, yet their pretense is hollow and unreal. Without genuine revelation, they can put on a humble manner for a while, but soon drop the pretense when they let their guard down. They must constantly be on their guard to maintain the outward appearance.

When we speak exhorting or even solemn words to brothers and sisters today, we must have spiritual inward sense. What we bring forth from our inner being may well be nothing but spiritual leprosy.

Remember this: God does not call us to serve Him based on how much we have consecrated, but on how much revelation we have received.

A brother once said to me, “Even if I become weaker, I am still stronger than those two brothers.” I could not help but think that this person has probably never truly seen his own corruption and filthiness all his life.

Those who serve the Lord must also have a spiritual sense toward the water of the world. To quench thirst is to satisfy our inner craving. Some of us have prayed for years, longing for worldly status, blessings, and material gain.

I hope from now on you will see through all these things and receive profound revelation from God: all satisfaction that comes from the world is in reality blood. To those with revelation, ordinary worldly water is actually blood. Even in trivial matters such as buying towels or socks, there lies the possibility of “water turning into blood”.

If we would serve God, we must no longer stay in Egypt drinking the water of the Nile. Instead, we must walk in the wilderness and drink the living water that flows from the rock.

We all need to see what we have never seen before. Those who have genuine revelation will confess: these worldly things are utterly deceptive. In man’s eyes, they are merely a rod, the natural flesh within us, and the river water of this world. But once you receive God’s revelation and vision, and discern their true nature as the serpent, the fallen flesh, and blood, you will flee inwardly, tremble with fear, and turn away from them.

Only God’s revelation can enable us to see the true nature of what we rely on, to recognize that the greatest sin is the self-life, and to perceive the horror of the world.

In the eyes of the world, the rod is reliable, the self-life is commendable, and the world's water is refreshing. Therefore, we must seek clear revelation before God, to discern the true reality of the world, our own self, and all our circumstances.