

“Putting Shackles on God!”

Psalm 78:40-43

Intro. – He was the bravest, swiftest and most handsome warrior in Homer’s *The Iliad and Odyssey*. During the first nine years of war, he ravaged the countryside. Men feared him everywhere and well they should for you see, this man was invincible. That’s right, no one or thing could harm him, with but one exception. It seems he had a weak heel. Well to make a long story short, this one exception was all it took to put this great warrior out of permanent commission. Achilles had a weak heel.

I use this to illustrate, unlike any other, our God, the God of Creation has no Achilles Heel! He has no weaknesses! In no way are we suggesting by this title that man can change, manipulate, or have any authority over the God of all. We can, however *limit* God. “What?!” you say, “Limit God?” Indeed. Through the choices we make we often *limit* God in the sense of receiving the full worth of God’s blessings.

This time of the year lends itself to this very matter. Is there any doubt that God desires above all else that all men would come back to Him in repentance? Why doesn’t God just forgive everyone? Why doesn’t God simply *enable* each local congregation to be the force they ought to be?

The answer to these and questions like them lie in the fact that each of us, by our choices, limit God. Our text speaks of how the children of Israel *tested, pained, or vexed* God. In a real sense, they, as you and I, put shackles on God in the matter of receiving His fullest blessings.

Purpose: to see how we put shackles on God

I BY THE LACK OF FAITH

- faith has always been required by God... Romans 10:17 makes clear where *faith* comes...
- other passages make clear what faith is and is not... following three elements result in the lack of faith:

A. A Weak Understanding

- deals with the fundamentals of what one believes:
 1. Having correct concept of God and His power...
 2. Having correct concept of God’s purpose for man...
 3. Having correct concept of what is and is not promised...
 - Illus. – He promises to be with us as compared to idea of always healing us physically...

B. A Weak Assent

- mind’s acceptance of facts... in our case the particular facts concerning the person of Jesus Christ
 1. Israel was more than “weak” in accepting “the facts”...
 2. Often today, we’re weak in accepting “the facts... concerning the Son of God... about His death... burial and resurrection... promise to come again...
 3. Be aware there are many “intellectual geniuses” doing their best to discredit the authority of the Bible especially in these areas...Such intellectual rejections make for “no faith”!

C. A Weak Trust

1. Weak trust is where man’s will is NOT submitted to Jesus as Lord and Savior...
2. Failure to accept and submit to the following:
 - a. what all He has done... is doing... and will do
 - b. this in particular is the one area where “faith” is so often weak.

With a mighty faith in God, things will happen, but with a weak/failing faith, God’s greatest blessings will never be extended. Why? Because God is shackled by the choice of weak faith!

II BY THE LACK OF PRAYER

- referring to the idea of praying in the wrong manner or not praying at all – throughout the Bible we find three key elements for *effective prayer* the absence of which results in *ineffective prayer*.

A. Absence of Praise

1. Praise is recognition of God’s great attributes...

2. Praise is worship – not just in a church building but throughout the week or daily living...

B. Absence of Petition

1. God desires to bless in response to our prayer, however, we limit His occasions to bless by petitioning with wrong motives or not even asking at all.
2. James 4:2-3 “...*you have not because you ask not... you ask and do not receive because you ask with wrong motives...*”
 - is it possible to be so caught up in ourselves we fail to petition God for what He truly desires to give us? Is it possible we ask with wrong motives?...

C. Absence of Thanksgiving

1. How often did Israel fail to give thanks?...
2. How often do we fail to give thanks?...

The blessings of God promised as a result of effective prayer are unlimited until we fail to pray. Again, through the lack of proper prayer we shackle God!

III BY THE LACK OF OBEDIENCE

- Hebrews 3:18-19 records again how children of Israel shackled God – “*And to whom did God swear that they would never enter His rest if not to those who disobeyed? So we see that they were not able to enter, because of their unbelief.*”
- Isaiah 59:1-2 points even clearer that disobedience always keeps God’s fullest blessings away – “*Surely the arm of the Lord is not too short to save, nor His ear too dull to hear. But your iniquities have separated you from your God; your sins have hidden His face from you so that He will not hear.*”

A. Purposeless Lives

1. Life is always given for a reason/purpose = to praise, honor and live for God...
2. Lives lived with God as an *afterthought* rather than as a *fore-thought* are purposeless lives...

B. Shattered Homes

1. God has a distinct and clear plan for the home – roles for husband, wife, children...
2. Obviously God’s plan for the home is being ignored in most quarters of the world...

C. Unforgiven Sinners

1. God desires that none would perish, but that all would repent and come to Him (2 Peter 3:9)...
2. God has provided a gift = GRACE
3. God has a prescribed manner in which this gift is to be received...
4. God does nothing but the best for mankind... but until man recognizes God’s purpose for life, design for the home, and gift of grace... God is *shackled!*
5. Illus. – Naaman the leper (head of the Syrian army) 2 Kings 5:1ff

Conclusion: Yes, we see there are several Biblical examples of how man puts shackles on God. To illustrate this further and to summarize this text let me use a personal story.

I remember when I was seven/eight years old my siblings and I were being put through the “allowance plan” using jars of coins. All of us were given certain tasks to do. When we failed to do the tasks in a timely, good order fashion a coin was removed from our particular jar (the one with our name on it). If tasks were done in a timely good fashion we would receive an allowance in accordance to the number of coins left in the jars. I know this is hard to believe but there were times I failed to do my tasks timely and in a good fashion. As a result there were weeks I received little to no allowance. My parents could have easily given the allowance, but then again they could not. You see, it wasn’t the money, it was their responsibility, love and character as parents that prevented their giving the allowance. I literally had shackled them from giving me an allowance...

This in a small way illus. how we shackle God... Note, not even suggesting we can earn or can merit forgiveness or favor from God... Am saying the Bible makes clear (Romans 8:31-32) how intently God desires to bless each of us. He will, as long as, we don’t shackle Him!