

Can God Be Limited?

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Let's begin by turning to Matthew, chapter 5, the Sermon on the Mount. We're going to look at one scripture here that tells what we already know. Just for emphasis, please turn to Matthew 5:48. Many places in the Bible talk about this. Christ, in His first sermon, was pointing this out.

Matthew 5:48. *Be you therefore perfect ... (KJV)*

He's talking to all the people around Him that heard that first sermon.

48b) *... even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect (complete). (KJV)*

We know God is perfect, and we also understand that God is all powerful. Within Him resides all power in the universe. That is emphasized in the first book of the Bible. Let's go to Genesis 17:1. After that we're going to go to the last book in the Bible, and this is emphasized again. Here it's talking about Abram.

Genesis 17:1. *And when Abram was ninety years old and nine (99 years), the Lord appeared to Abram, and said unto him ... (KJV)*

God was introducing Himself.

1b) *... I [am] the Almighty God; walk before me, and be you perfect. (KJV)*

"I am Almighty," He says. That is reiterated in Revelation 19:15, and we'll see that it is said again in the last book of the Bible. There is no power that does not come from God. He has all power.

Revelation 19:15. *And out of His mouth goes a sharp sword, that with it He should smite the nations: and He shall rule them with a rod of iron: and He treads the winepress of the fierceness and wrath of Almighty God. (KJV)*

Now whether you look at the Hebrew or the Greek for the word "almighty," it means the same. It means *omnipotent* and/or *all powerful*. God is perfect, He is omnipotent and He is all powerful.

With that in mind, let's turn to Psalms 78 and read a scripture that some people say is a contradiction. Some say that this proves the Bible contradicts itself. Notice this. We will read verses 40 and 41. David is talking about Israel. He says the following:

Psalms 78:40. *How often did they provoke Him (referring to Christ, the God of the Old Testament) in the wilderness, and grieve Him in the desert!*

41) *Yes, they turned back and tempted God ... (KJV)*

The King James says “tempted,” but it actually means “*tested*.” They tested God. Now notice this last phrase.

41b) *... and limited the Holy One of Israel. (KJV)*

He is saying that the nation of Israel limited God. Now the Hebrew word for “limited” is Strong’s 8428, and it’s the Hebrew word “tavah.” In English it is spelled T A V A H. The Complete Word Study Dictionary of the Old Testament by Baker and Carpenter says the following. I’m going to quote about this word “limited.” “A verb meaning *to limit*. *It has the sense of restraining persons from what they can do because of one’s own attitudes or actions.*” I’ll say it again. “*It has the sense of restraining persons from what they can do because of one’s own attitudes or actions.*”

What David is saying is that Israel restrained, limited God and kept God from doing what He wanted to do. How do you reconcile this? If God is all powerful, omnipotent, all knowing, has all the power in the universe, and yet this nation of Israel stopped Him, limited Him from doing what He wanted to do, that begs the question and this is the title of the sermon.

Can God Be Limited?

Can God be limited if He is all powerful? A more important question for us today: Can we as individuals limit God? Can we do that?

Point number 1: We’re going to look at two examples in the Bible of humans limiting God. We’re going to see that, yes, it can happen.

A. The first one we want to look at is ancient Israel limiting God as David just said.

Let’s look into the details and see what David was talking about. Back in Psalms 78 and we will begin in verse 10. David says ...

Psalm 78:10. *They (Israel) kept not the covenant of God, and refused to walk in His law;*

11) *And forgot His works, and His wonders that He showed them.*

12) *Marvelous things did He in the sight of their fathers, in the land of Egypt, [is] the field of Zoan.*

13) *He divided the sea, and caused them to pass through; and He made the waters to stand as an heap.*

14) *In the daytime also He led them with a cloud, and all the night with a light of fire.*

24) *And had rained down manna upon them to eat, and had given them of the corn of heaven. (KJV)*

Look at what He did. You see, they forgot that. They forgot all those miracles and all that power.

37) For their heart was not right with Him, neither were they steadfast in His covenant.

38) But He, [being] full of compassion, forgave [their] iniquity, and destroyed [them] not; yea, many a time turned He his anger away, and did not stir up all His wrath.

39) For He remembered that they [were but] all flesh (as we all are); a wind that passes away, and comes not again.

40) How often did they provoke Him in the wilderness, [and] grieve Him in the desert!

41) Yes, they turned back and tempted God, and limited the Holy One of Israel. (KJV)

What David is saying here is that they limited God by their rebellion and their sins. They stopped God from doing what He wanted to do.

Let's look at the specifics and see what David is talking about. Turn to Numbers 13 and we're going to read verses 25 through 32. The context is that Israel is on the east side of Jordan. Joshua sent spies into the land for forty days to spy out the land and now they come back with their report. We are breaking into that context.

Numbers 13:25. *And they returned from searching of the land after forty days.*

26) And they went and came to Moses, and to Aaron, and to all the congregation of the children of Israel, unto the wilderness of Paran, to Kadesh; and brought back word unto them, and unto all the congregation, and showed them the fruit of the land. (KJV)

They brought back the produce of this very fertile land.

27) And they told him, and said, We came unto the land where you sent us, and surely it flows with milk and honey; and this [is] the fruit of it. (KJV)

They showed all the people there.

28) Nevertheless the people [be] strong that dwell in the land, and the cities [are] walled, [and] very great: and moreover we saw the children of Anak there. (KJV)

That is a race of very large people called giants. They were big boned, tall, strong and muscular. It scared them to death.

29) The Amalekites dwell in the land of the south: and the Hittites, and the Jebusites, and the Amorites dwell in the mountains: and the Canaanites dwell by the sea, and by the coast of Jordan. (KJV)

At this point the people are starting to get agitated and be afraid by this report.

30) And Caleb stilled the people before Moses, and said, Let us go up at once, and possess it; for we are well able to overcome it. (KJV)

Well of course! If God is on your side and performed all the miracles coming out of Egypt and parted the Red Sea, what are a few walled cities? It's no big deal. But that's not the way the people looked at it.

31) But the men that went up with him said, "We be not able to go up against the people; for they [are] stronger than we." (KJV)

They totally left God out of the picture. Yes, by themselves they didn't have the power, but God is all powerful. They were forgetting that.

32) And they brought up an evil report of the land which they had searched unto the children of Israel, saying, "The land, through which we have gone to search it, [is] a land that eats up the inhabitants thereof; and all the people that we saw in it [are] men of a great stature." (KJV)

Now let's stop and look at this juncture. There is a fork in the road. God is saying, "I'm going to give you the Promised Land. I'm going to be with you to wipe out all of the people if you will just obey Me and follow Me."

On the other hand, as with Adam and Eve, they could make a choice and say, "No, we don't want to do that." That's exactly what they did. They chose to turn down this opportunity of going into the Promised Land. They turned it down. Look at Numbers, chapter 14 beginning in verse 26. Notice God's reaction.

Numbers 14:26. *And the Lord spoke with Moses and unto Aaron, saying,*

27) How long [shall I bear with] this evil congregation, which murmur against me? I have heard the murmurings of the children of Israel, which they murmur against me.

28) Say unto them, [As truly as] I live, says the Lord, as you have spoken in my ears, so will I do to you:

29) Your carcasses shall fall in this wilderness; and all that were numbered of you, according to your whole number, from twenty years old and upward, which have murmured against me,

30) Doubtless you shall not come into the land, [concerning] which I swore to make you dwell therein, save Caleb the son of Jephunneh, and Joshua the son of Nun.

31) But your little ones, which you said should be a prey, those will I bring in ... (KJV)

The ones that they were saying, “Oh, these giants are going to kill all our kids. We can’t defend our children. We can’t defend our families.” God is saying, “Okay, I’m going to bring them into the Promised Land since you didn’t want to do that.”

31b) ... and they shall know the land which you have despised.

32) But [as for] you, your carcasses, they shall fall in this wilderness.

33) And your children shall wander in the wilderness forty years, and bear your whoredoms, until your carcasses be wasted in the wilderness. (KJV)

Here is an example where the children had to pay the price for their parents’ sins. The Bible talks about the sins of the fathers to the third and fourth generation. This is a perfect example of that.

34) After the number of the days in which you searched the land, [even] forty days, each day for a year, shall you bear your iniquities, [even] forty years, and you shall know my breach of promise. (KJV)

What they did is, by their lack of faith, they altered God’s plan. They limited God. They altered His plan. The generation that had to wander forty years and die in the wilderness limited what God could do with them and through them because of their choice. So Israel limited God as we have just seen.

B. Let’s look at a second example, a New Testament example where Judah limited Christ when Christ was walking this earth.

Let’s go to Matthew 13 and we will read verses 54 through 58. Christ is coming into the country where He was born. He is preaching the gospel. Notice their reaction.

Matthew 13:54. *And when he was come into his own country, he taught them in their synagogue, insomuch that they were astonished, and said, where did this [man] get this wisdom, and [these] mighty works?*

55) Is not this the carpenter’s son? Is not his mother called Mary, and his brethren, James, and Joses, and Simon, and Judas?

56) And his sisters, are they not all with us? Where then has this [man] all these things?

57) And they were offended in him. But Jesus said unto them ... (KJV)

This is a very famous scripture that people quote all around the world today.

57b) ... “A prophet is not without honor, save in his own country, and in his own house.” (KJV)

Notice what happened in verse 58.

58) And he did not many mighty works there because of their unbelief. (KJV)

They limited what He could do among them. Here is an important point that we will amplify later. The point is that their lack of faith did not stop Christ from performing miracles. What their lack of faith did is prevent Him from performing those miracles in their locality. He just performed the miracles somewhere else. Because of their attitude and their lack of faith, He just decided, "Okay, if that's the way you feel and that's what you believe and you're looking at Me that way, I'll just do My miracles somewhere else." They limited in that sense what He could do through them or with them or in their presence.

So we have seen here in the first point, two examples of a group of individuals, Israel, and a smaller group of individuals where Christ grew up of limiting what God can do.

Now we get to the second big point. We will spend the rest of the sermon on this.

Point number 2: It comes to a big question: How can we limit God in our own lives?

We've seen that ancient Israel and the Jews did this. Can we limit God in our own lives? We are going to find that there are two ways we can limit God.

We can limit Him in what He can do inside us and we can limit Him in what He can do through us reaching out to other people.

A. Limiting God in what He can do in us, inside us.

Let's go to John 14:23. This was a new concept that Christ was introducing shortly before He died in the sense of the Father and the Son coming and living inside a human being.

John 14:23. *Jesus answered and said unto him (He was talking to Judas, not Iscariot), "If a man love me, he will keep my words: and my Father will love him, and we will come unto him, and make our abode with him."* (KJV)

This is a new concept.

The Greek word for "abode" is Strong's 3438 and it's the Greek word "mone." It is spelled in English m-o-n-e. It means literally *a staying, a place where you would go to stay that is a residence*. So what Christ is saying is, "We will come and reside in you." This is what He is saying.

The apostles carried that theme all throughout their teaching in the New Testament. Look at 1 John 4:13. John lived to a very old age. He was preaching long after the other apostles died and he was preaching the same thing, and he amplifies it. John says:

1 John 4:13. *Hereby know we that we dwell in him, and He in us (How do we know that?) because He has given us of his Spirit. (KJV)*

So you see the spirit is the key, the link between the spirit world and the physical world. It is the link between us and the Father and the Son. If we have God's spirit in us then we can communicate back and forth. God can inspire us, we can talk to Him, we can learn about Him, the Bible starts to make sense. We know all of that.

What is the purpose of their coming and living in us? The purpose is to change us from the old person to the new person. Ephesians 4; let's go there. We've read this many times. Verses 22 and 23. It is possible, through God's spirit, to have a different mind, a different character and become a different person. Notice what it says. Paul is saying:

Ephesians 4:22. *That you put off concerning the former conversation the old man, which is corrupt according to the deceitful lusts; (KJV)*

We have all been there, and we have all done that. Verse 23: here's the purpose of the holy spirit living in us.

23) And be renewed in the spirit of your mind; (KJV)

Have a new mind. Philippians 2:5 tells us what that mind is. It is the mind of Christ. So we are given God's holy spirit to make the transformation of the Satanic mind, the carnal mind to the mind of Christ. It is made possible by the holy spirit dwelling in us.

But you see we can actually oppose that. We can fight against that process, thereby limiting God. We fight against it because of the very familiar scripture: The carnal mind is what? It is the enemy of God. It is not subject to the laws of God, neither indeed can be ... Romans 8:7. So if we allow our carnal side to rise up, we can actually limit what God's holy spirit does inside of us.

We can oppose God's spirit in several important ways. For example, if we limit our Bible study, we limit what God can say to us. Did you ever think about that? If we cut back on our Bible study, what we are saying is, "God, I don't want You to talk to me as much anymore." We are limiting what God can say to us through His word.

If we limit our prayer, then we limit our closeness to God. We limit our communication with God. Therefore, we limit what He can do in us.

If we limit exercising God's holy spirit by not controlling our mouths, not controlling our mind, by not doing the things that we should, then it limits our becoming like Jesus Christ. We can limit, we can oppose what God is trying to do within us.

Let me give you an example. This is bizarre in one way, but it is so true. It is a true story that I know personally. It's about a couple back in the 1990s, not in this area. They began to watch a program on television called "The X Files." If you remember that

or not; it was popular in the 1990s. It was kind of a science fiction, alien, conspiracy theory drama where there were aliens on the earth and they were doing whatever they were doing on this earth and these two people, a man and a woman were trying to counter that. It was kind of a dark mysterious conspiracy theory drama. Over a period of months, they became addicted to watching this. They talked about it at church on the Sabbath. They just wouldn't miss one of these episodes. You can see things going on behind the scenes. Guess what happened? The network moved the show from a week night to Friday night. Now they were at a crossroads. What are they going to do? They convinced themselves (we found out later) that it was okay to watch it on Friday night. They went through the mental gymnastics to make that happen. So what they would do is first have a Sabbath meal and put their children to bed, say their prayers, get everything ready and then watch this show. It became the highlight of their Friday evening. This didn't come out until later, but the fact is that within a year they left the church. This was over a television show. Obviously there was a lot more going on, but the point is that they limited what God could do in them by the choices they made. Their actions actually opposed what God was trying to do in them.

Now rather than oppose what God is trying to do in us, we should cultivate the Father and the Son dwelling in us and what they can do in us. Let's go to 1 Timothy 4:7. Paul is telling Timothy, "You need to cultivate this relationship. You need to grow this relationship." Timothy had a hard job. He was a young guy, a new minister dealing with people old enough probably to be his grandparents. He ran into all kinds of problems and Paul is giving him advice.

1 Timothy 4:7. But refuse profane and old wives fables ... (KJV)

Those are still going on today, by the way.

7b) ... and exercise yourself [rather] unto godliness. (KJV)

The Greek word for "exercise" is used in athletic terms like body building, the Olympics, training for the games, etc. Like those of you who have ever lifted weights, you know that if you go on a weight training program and you keep at it for a number of years you can actually change the shape of your body. The shoulders get wider, the waist gets narrower, the biceps and triceps get bigger, your legs get bigger and you actually look differently. You become, in that sense, a different person by exercise.

What Paul is saying, "Okay, physical exercise is fine, but I want you to exercise yourself unto Godliness." What that tells us is, by the Father and the Son dwelling in us and if we exercise the holy spirit, God can change who we are. He can change our very nature from the old person to the new person which has the mind of Christ, if we let Him, if we don't allow ourselves to become a stumbling block to that process.

Let's look at the life of Paul as an example. We covered Paul in detail not long ago and we recognize the fact and know that Paul changed from a murderer of Christians to a helper of Christians. Look at the transformation that took place in the mind of Paul, from

a murderer to one that loves and helps Christians. In the beginning, Paul fought Christ. Let's go to Acts 9:5. We're breaking into the road to Damascus moment. Paul has been struck down, he is bewildered and doesn't know what is happening. Paul is saying to this being that struck him down:

Acts 9:5. *And he said, Who are you, Lord? And the Lord said, I am Jesus whom you persecute (you oppose): [it is] hard for you to kick against the pricks. (KJV)*

We drew the analogy. It's like walking up to a rose bush, taking your shoes and socks off and start kicking at the bush. You do it over and over and over again. You realize that your feet are bloody and torn up and you're in great pain. Christ is telling Paul, "This is what you are doing. You are kicking against the pricks." Paul was opposing Christ. But after that incident, Paul changed and he allowed God to work inside him. He allowed Christ to work inside him.

Look at 2 Corinthians, chapter 1. It's the second letter to the Corinthians that we have a record of. Paul told them to get rid of that guy who was having incest with his stepmother. In 2 Corinthians, chapter 1, he begins the process of bringing this man back, because they were ostracizing him and he had repented.

2 Corinthians 1:24. *Not for that we have dominion over your faith ... (KJV)*

Paul is saying, "Look, a minister can't put a gun to somebody's head and make them have faith. You can't put a gun to somebody's head and make them want God's spirit inside them. We don't have dominion over your faith. We can't force that."

24b) ... but are helpers of your joy ... (KJV)

From murderers to helpers of your joy.

24 continued) ... for by faith you stand. (KJV)

The Greek word for "helpers" here is interesting. It's Strong's 4904, and it's the Greek word "sunergos," and we get our English word for synergy from that Greek word. Synergy is where two different forces or beings or whatever come together and work together. They cooperate in harmony. It means a *co-laborer, a companion in labor, a fellow helper*. So Paul is saying, "I've gone from murdering Christians to helping Christians, and help them in their joy."

Look at the dramatic change that God made in Paul's life because Paul allowed Him to come inside and work in him to change him. If we, like Paul, do not present a stumbling block to what God is trying to do in us and limit what God does inside us, we won't limit His purpose for us. It is up to us, just like it was for ancient Israel.

So the first way that we can limit God is by what God can do inside us.

B. We can limit God by what He can do through us, using us as a tool or an instrument to accomplish His will.

As God did with the generation of Israelites who had to wander in the wilderness, notice Exodus 34:7. They had to wander forty years in the wilderness. God did this because of what they chose to do.

Exodus 34:7. Keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, and that will by no means clear [the guilty]... (KJV)

If someone hasn't repented or refuses to change, the record is still there.

7b) ... visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children and upon the children's children, unto the third and to the fourth [generation]. (KJV)

So, as with Israel, our sins can affect our children, our grandchildren and our great-grandchildren. Our sins can affect them negatively. Our sins can then limit what God can do through us to reach others.

In the Worldwide Church of God in the late '80s or early '90s, I went to a ministerial conference in Pasadena. Mr. Armstrong was dead at the time, but the church commissioned a survey. They sent out a statistically significant sample of questionnaires to members of the Worldwide Church of God at that time. One of the questions was: How were you called? Remember, there were about 185,000 people in attendance at that time. The question was: What first brought you in contact with God's word, with the church? Was it the Plain Truth, or a radio broadcast or a television broadcast or a correspondence course? Sixty-five percent of the brethren in that survey responded that they came in contact with God's truth through another human being; a relative, friend, coworker, neighbor, or whatever it might be ... sixty-five percent.

Now, think of the possibilities here. What if God was trying to call an individual, someone you know or I know let's say, and what if I was having a bad day? Perhaps I was in a snit or whatever, and I come in contact with this individual and behaved carnally. You limit what God can do at that moment. Why would somebody want to follow or make friends with or learn about someone who is behaving like a jerk? But on the other hand, if we allow God to work in us and through us, you see, then we become different than the average person, and people notice that. Many were called into the church because this person was different. This person wasn't like all the other people. But if we behave carnally, we can limit God in that process.

Let me give you two examples. This involves an evangelist in the Worldwide Church of God. He is still alive today. If I would mention his name, everyone would recognize it. This was back in the '60s and '70s, and he and his wife had two daughters. They lived in Big Sandy and had other assignments over the years. He mentioned that he was mourning the fact that he and his wife made a mistake in raising their children, because

on the way to church and the way home, they would talk about the church's dirty laundry. They would talk about all the problems in the church. They would talk about individuals in the church, stuff that was going on and things that happened. The girls were in the back seat, starting as little kids barely able to understand language and all the way up to their teens. This continued for probably fifteen years. He was lamenting that and saying what a big mistake that was, because when those girls came to be seventeen or eighteen years old, they wanted nothing to do with the church. They heard too much and saw too much. So the parents limited what God could do through them with their girls because of their actions. They became a stumbling block to their children potentially being called.

Let me give you another example. There was a single mom (this goes back thirty or forty years) who had a teenage daughter. The daughter was perhaps thirteen or fourteen, she began having nightmares and this went on for a period of time. So she went to the local minister, an A.C. graduate, to talk to him about what was going on with her daughter. He listened for a couple of minutes and then pronounced, in the daughter's presence, that she had a demon. Now think about this. You're twelve, thirteen or fourteen years old and your pastor, that you look up to says, "You are possessed by a demon." This traumatized this young girl. Can you imagine trying to go to bed at night thinking that there is a demon in the room or there is a demon inside you or a demon whispering in your ear? It made the condition worse and worse to the point that, as an adult, this young girl wants absolutely nothing to do with God, the church or Jesus Christ. She wants nothing to do with any of that because of what this minister said to her just off the cuff. Thereby what that man did limited what God could do through this young girl in that sense.

Now if we let God, He will use us for the greater good of His children. That's the point of all of us, ministers and everybody. If we allow God to work through us, then God will use us for the greater good of all of God's children that we come in contact with. If we get out of God's way, then we are not a barrier to that process. If Israel had said, "Okay God, we understand. We will just sit here and watch You do what You are going to do. We will go over to the Promised Land and trust in You to take care of all of our problems that we face. But they didn't do that. They became a stumbling block to that process.

Let's go to 1 Peter 3:7. We used this last time talking about marriages. This is the context, but let's look at the principle of whether we either inhibit or facilitate what God can do. It is addressing specifically husbands, but it applies to wives, single people and to all of us.

1 Peter 3:7. *Likewise, you husbands, dwell with [them] (referring to the mate) according to knowledge, giving honor unto the wife ... (KJV)*

Treasure her and honor her.

7b) ... as unto the weaker vessel ... (KJV)

Notice this:

7 continued) ... and as being heirs together of the grace of life ... (KJV)

You are partners, walking together towards salvation. Walking together to be the Bride of Christ. Honor her in doing that.

7 continued) ... that your prayers (husbands and wives) be not hindered. (KJV)

He is talking to the husbands, but it applies both ways. It applies to all of us. So if a husband doesn't honor the wife, if he abuses the wife and treats her badly and still calls himself a Christian, then he is limiting what God can do through him to aid his wife. He is not an aid to his wife. He is a stumbling block to his wife becoming a better Christian. This is what Peter is trying to point out here. The husband in this case is limiting what God can do through him as a husband.

Other than Jesus Christ, the man in the Bible who had the most influence over the most people was Moses. Look at the millions of people Moses had a direct impact on and a direct influence over. Yet Moses did his very best to limit God in what God wanted to do through him. He wanted to thwart God's plan. Moses gave God four excuses why God shouldn't do what God wanted to do. We're going to break into the context. Turn to Exodus, chapter 3. We are breaking into the context of the burning bush. I grew up in west Texas and we, as kids, for fun would set tumble weeds on fire. They would burn ferociously for two or three seconds and then there was nothing left. Well, Moses came upon this bush. We don't know necessarily what it was, but it was burning ferociously, but it didn't quit burning and it didn't burn up. He was walking up to this and we know the story. God begins to talk to him. God said, "You're on holy ground. You'd better take your sandals off." Then God told Moses what He wanted him to do, to rescue His people from Egypt.

Moses offered four excuses. The first one: He said, "I'm not qualified. I'm not good enough." Look at verse 11. Moses said to God:

Exodus 3:11. *And Moses said unto God, Who [am] I, that I should go unto Pharaoh, and that I should bring forth the children of Israel out of Egypt? (KJV)*

"Who am I? I don't have any special qualifications. I'm a nobody. I'm not qualified."

His second excuse was: "I don't have the faith. I don't believe this is going to happen." Look at chapter 4, verse 1.

Exodus 4:1. *And Moses answered and said, "But, behold, they will not believe me, nor hearken unto my voice: for they will say, The Lord has not appeared unto you." (KJV)*

“You’re just talking. You’re just an empty vessel and what you are saying isn’t true.” So the second excuse is: “I don’t have the faith.”

The third excuse is: “I’ve got a disability. I have a speech impediment.”

Exodus 4:10. *And Moses said unto the Lord, “O my Lord, I [am] not eloquent, neither heretofore, nor since you have spoken unto your servant: but I [am] slow of speech, and of a slow tongue.” (KJV)*

He repeats this twice in chapter 6. We don’t know what the impediment was, whether he just wasn’t a good public speaker, whether he had a high shrill voice. We just don’t know what the problem was, but he had some disability and he was saying, “God, I just can’t do this. I have this disability.”

The fourth excuse: and this is the one that is the most prevalent for all of us. That excuse was: “I don’t want to. I don’t want to do this.” Look at verse 13. I’ll read it out of the NIV.

Exodus 4:13. *But Moses said, “O Lord, please send someone else to do it.” (NIV)*

“I don’t want to. It’s too much for me. I want to sit back and watch my big screen T.V. and eat potato chips. I don’t want to do this.”

So he offered four excuses. At this point, Moses was unconsciously trying to limit God on what God wanted to do to rescue Israel from Egypt’s grasp. The same is true for us if we want our own way versus God’s way. If we want to do it our way, what we are saying is, “God, I’m going to prevent You from what You want to do. I’m going to do what I want to do.” That’s what Moses was trying to do. But you see, at this time Moses didn’t have Christ’s faith in him to make it happen. He didn’t have Christ’s vision of what Christ wanted to do in bringing Israel out of Egypt, but look at how he changed from these four excuses. Look at how he changed. Look at how he allowed God to use him. What God did was take him in little baby steps, little bite-sized chunks to get him where He wanted him to be. He does exactly the same with us.

Let’s go to chapter 4 again and we will read verses 2 through 5. God is dealing with the excuse, “They will not believe me.”

Exodus 4:2. *And the Lord said to him, “What [is] that in your hand?” And he said, “A rod.”*

3) And he said, “Cast it on the ground.” And he cast it on the ground, and it became a serpent (snake); and Moses fled from before it. (KJV)

Moses jumped. Growing up in west Texas, I’ve had encounters with rattlesnakes. We have them in this area too in central Washington and in other parts of the country. When you hear that rattler, your first instinct is to jump and get out of there, and that’s

exactly what Moses did. I'm sure he let out a yelp, jumped a couple of feet and went eight or ten feet in a different direction. He was trembling as we would be. In verse 4, God said to Moses ... notice, here is a little test of faith, a little bite-sized chunk.

4) And the Lord said unto Moses, "Put forth your hand, and take it by the tail..." (KJV)

People just hate snakes, and can you imagine at that time here's the burning bush, this voice is coming out of the burning bush, the snake is on the ground and you're several feet from it and this voice says, "I want you to pick up that snake by the tail." I'm sure Moses approached inch by inch, reached out his hand delicately, ready to jump back at any moment, and the minute his hand touched the tail it just went straight and turned into a rod. It was a tiny test of faith, and he passed that test. He was encouraged by that, I'm sure.

*4b) ... And he put forth his hand, and caught it, and it became a rod in his hand:
5) That they may believe that the Lord God of their fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, has appeared unto you. (KJV)*

It was a very small miracle that required a little bit of faith and it was very small compared to what God was later going to ask him to do and small compared to the faith God was going to ask of him to do what God wanted him to do.

Then after this, God gave him visible help. He can't see God because there is this voice coming out of the burning bush, but what God did do is give him some visible help, a crutch. Sometimes we all need crutches. Look at verse 14. This is the context of the third excuse, "I am slow of speech."

14) And the anger of the Lord was kindled against Moses, and He said, "[Is] not Aaron the Levite your brother? I know that he can speak well. And also, behold, he comes forth to meet you: and when he sees you, he will be glad in his heart." (KJV)

Now let's stop here. God obviously knew that Moses was going to give Him this excuse. God obviously knew that Moses had some impediment of his speech. We don't know what it was. God had planned to overcome this objection by using Aaron. So at some point long before the burning bush episode, (we don't know if it was hours or days or weeks) He put in Aaron's mind to go see his brother. Aaron didn't just pop up there locally. Aaron had to start on this journey long before the episode of the burning bush. You see what God is doing; He is moving the chess pieces on the board in a way Moses didn't understand and Aaron didn't understand. He does the same with us. We don't understand at the time, but He brought it all together at just the right time. All of a sudden now visible help comes. He said in verse 15:

15) "And you shall speak unto him, and put words in his mouth: and I will be with your mouth, and with his mouth, and will teach you what you shall do." (KJV)

He is saying, "Moses, I'm going to whisper in your ear, and I want you to whisper the same thing I whispered in your ear into Aaron's ear and then he will do the talking. You don't have to worry about it."

16) *"And he shall be your spokesman unto the people: and he shall be, [even] he shall be to you instead of a mouth, and you shall be to him instead of God."*
(KJV)

What He is saying is, "I'm going to tell you what to tell him, therefore, it's like you're me talking directly into his ear. What you are saying comes from me." So in that sense, Moses was like God because Moses was transmitting God's words into Aaron's ear.

17) *"And you shall take this rod in your hand, wherewith you shall do signs."*
(KJV)

So the point is, at that very spot with the burning bush, he has two crutches. He has the rod and he has his brother, Aaron. God is helping him along the path to grow and develop.

Then when he witnessed the ten miracles, what would that do to your faith? Water turning into blood, the frogs, the dust becoming lice, the flies, the disease killing a portion of the cattle, then boils, the thunder and hail that came down that was on fire; now figure that one out. The locusts and the very thick darkness and then finally the killing of the firstborn. Each time God said, "This is going to happen," and sure enough, it happened. So over that space, you see Moses' vision became more and more like God's and his faith became more like the faith of Jesus Christ.

Now that is a microcosm, in a very short period of time, of what God is doing with us every day of our lives. The longer we are converted, the more we exercise His spirit, the more we allow Him to work through us, the greater our faith and the greater our vision.

Now, look at the result in Exodus 14:1.

Exodus 14:1. *And the Lord spoke unto Moses, saying,*
2) *"Speak unto the children of Israel, that they turn and encamp before Pihahiroth ..."* (KJV)

They are fleeing. The miracles have occurred, they are leaving Egypt and He says, "I want you to encamp before Pihahiroth:"

2b) *"... between Migdol and the sea, over against Baalzephon: before it shall you encamp by the sea."* (KJV)

So what was happening is, Egypt is over here and they're fleeing to the southeast. The Red Sea is here; it's a barrier, but there is also a chain of mountains that run from the northwest to the southeast, and they terminate at the Red Sea, so you have this "V". God was marching them down to the point of the "V". So the closer they got to that point, the Red Sea began getting closer and closer on their right-hand side, the mountains began getting closer and closer on their left-hand side and they couldn't go any further. The only open country was behind them where they just came from ... the open end of the "V". Guess what? They looked back and saw the dust clouds of this army coming after them.

10) And when Pharaoh drew nigh, the children of Israel lifted up their eyes, and, behold, the Egyptians marched after them; and they were sore afraid: and the children of Israel cried out unto the Lord.

11) And they said unto Moses, "Because [there were] no graves in Egypt, have you taken us away to die in the wilderness? Why have you dealt thus with us, to carry us forth out of Egypt?"

12) [Is] not this the word that we did tell you in Egypt, saying, Let us alone..." (KJV)

Now that's exactly what Moses tried to do to God with the four excuses. "Just leave me alone! Go pick somebody else." Israel is doing exactly the same thing.

12b) "... that we may serve the Egyptians? For [it had been] better for us to serve the Egyptians, than that we should die in the wilderness." (KJV)

In verse 13, notice what it says.

13) And Moses said unto the people ...

God didn't say this. Notice the change in Moses. Notice what God is doing through Moses. Look at the change from the four excuses to this very time.

13b) "... Fear not, stand still, and see the salvation of the Lord ..." (KJV)

Look at the increase in his faith. Don't have to do a thing ... just stand there.

13 continued) "... which he will show to you today: for the Egyptians whom you have seen today, you shall see them again no more forever.

14) The Lord shall fight for you, and you shall hold your peace." (KJV)

You just need to be quiet and watch it happen. Look at the difference in Moses. Now in chapter 15, look at Moses' focus on God, not on himself, not on the problems. Look at his focus on God. This was a song that was composed to commemorate this occasion.

Exodus 15:1. *Then sang Moses and the children of Israel this song unto the Eternal, and spoke, saying, I will sing unto the Lord, for He has triumphed*

gloriously (giving God all the credit); the horse and his rider has He thrown into the sea.

2) The Lord [is] my strength ... (KJV)

He's relying on God.

2b) ... and song, and He is become my salvation: He [is] my God, and I will prepare him an habitation; my father's God, and I will exalt him.

3) The Lord [is] a man of war: the Lord [is] his name.

4) Pharaoh's chariots and his host has He (referring to God) cast into the sea: his chosen captains also are drowned in the Red Sea.

5) The depths have covered them; they sank into the bottom as a stone. (KJV)

Then he goes on to say in verse 6:

6) Your right hand, O Eternal, is become glorious in power: Your right hand (God's right hand), O Lord, has dashed in pieces the enemy.

7) And in the greatness of your excellency you have overthrown them that rose up against you: You sent forth your wrath, [which] consumed them as stubble.

8) And with the blast of your nostrils the waters were gathered together, the floods stood upright as a heap, [and] the depths were congealed in the heart of the sea.

9) The enemy (Pharaoh) said, I will pursue, I will overtake. I will divide the spoil; my lust shall be satisfied upon them; I will draw my sword, my hand shall destroy them. (KJV)

A typical man; look what I'm going to do. I'm going to take vengeance. I'm going to right these wrongs. I'm going to take care of this.

10) You (God) did blow with your wind, the sea covered them: they sank as lead in the mighty waters.

11) Who [is] like you, O Lord, among the gods? Who [is] like you, glorious in holiness, fearful ... (KJV)

The Hebrew means *to revere in praises and doing wonders*.

11b) ... [in] praises, doing wonders?

12) You stretched out your right hand, the earth swallowed them.

13) You in your mercy have led forth the people [which] You have redeemed: You have guided [them] in your strength unto your holy habitation. (KJV)

All the focus is on God, not on himself. Moses overcame his excuses by God's love, God's patience and God's power. Moses finally ceased being a stumbling block and became a facilitator of what God was trying to do with ancient Israel, and he was allowing God to work through him to accomplish God's purposes. Look at the change. Now look at what he allowed God to do through him.

Both Moses and Paul are lessons for us. Paul is a lesson of the change in a human from killing Christians to encouraging and helping Christians to change. Moses is an example for allowing God's spirit to work through him to accomplish God's will for millions of Israelites to serve and help others to do God's will.

Okay let's conclude here by asking a critical question. Can we limit God in our lives? The answer is obvious; yes, we can do that. God ordained that humans are free moral agents, and when God ordained that, He accepted and understood that humans can limit Him if they are free moral agents that choose to go the wrong way. They can do that. We make choices as Adam and Eve made choices. We can go to the Tree of Life or we can go our own way.

Let's look at Galatians 6:8. This is the principle that follows our choices. This is something we have to deal with every day of our lives, because it is God's law whether we do good or do evil.

Galatians 6:8. *For he that sows to his flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption ... (KJV)*

Horrible things ... death, disease, sorrow, sadness.

8b) but he that sows to the spirit shall of the spirit reap life everlasting. (KJV)

You see, we can limit God by saying no and we lose our salvation. God wants us in His kingdom, but if we say no by our actions or by our words, we can limit what He would like to do in us and through us. We can limit God because of sin, because of lack of faith, because of carnality, selfishness, by not exercising God's holy spirit, not controlling our mouth, not controlling our mind, not doing the things that we should be doing to have the mind and behavior of Jesus Christ. In that sense, we can limit God in what He is attempting to do in us.

You see, the big question we also should address right now is: If we individually can limit God, then can God's plan be limited? Can God's plan be changed? Absolutely not. God's plan is God's plan. God will do what God will do with us or without us. Look at the children of Israel, that first generation, they said, "No, we don't want to do that. We don't believe you. We're going to die over there if we cross that river." So guess what God did? He said, "Okay, if you want it that way then you will wander forty years in the wilderness." What He did is choose a different group of people. He chose the next generation. "I'll use them. I'm not going to use you. You don't want Me to use you. I'll use them."

Look at Luke 3:8. We're breaking into the context where John the Baptist is talking to the religious leaders and other people standing around him. But notice the principle. This is the principle of God not using that first generation of Israelites. Here John the Baptist is speaking.

Luke 3:8. *Bring forth therefore fruits worthy of repentance ... (KJV)*

Bring fruits that demonstrate the fact that you have repented.

8b) ... and begin not to say within yourselves, "We have Abraham to [our] father ..." (KJV)

"We don't need you; we don't need Christ; we don't need John the Baptist, because Abraham is our father. We are of the right race, the right blood and, therefore, we don't need a thing." It sounds like the Laodicean attitude. "We don't need a thing. Leave me alone."

8 continued) "... for I say unto you, that God is able of these stones to raise up children unto Abraham." (KJV)

He could have raised up stones to go into the Promised Land, and for those that don't want to follow God, He just chooses someone else. When we limit God, what He can do through us (and this is the scary thought) guess what He does? He just picks someone else. He does it through another person, just like He did with that next generation in Israel.

So you see we have this incomprehensible, incomparable opportunity by God calling us, by God choosing us, to live inside of us, to change us and use us as instruments to do His will here in these end days. So the onus is on us. We cannot waste one second in making sure that God changes us (who we are) and that we allow His Spirit to work through us to do His will in the church, in our neighborhood, in our family and with our friends.

So the lesson here is: Let us never be responsible for limiting God.