

PSALM 1

THE WAY OF RIGHTEOUSNESS

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INTRODUCTION: Since the Psalms were divinely ordered (Act13:33), this psalm is first by design. It is a fitting opening to the Psalter, contrasting the two ways of life open to mankind (Matt7:13-14), the way of righteousness (vv1-3,6a) and the way of wickedness (vv4-5,6b).

THE GODLY MAN

- [1] Here 'Blessed' is plural in the Hebrew, being literally, "blessed with blessedness" or "abundantly blessed". For man to be "abundantly blessed" requires him to shun wicked influences (v1) and embrace Godly influence (v2).

Note the trend of progressively increasing compromise with wickedness in the use of the verbs: walk, stand, sit. What starts with occasional consideration of the opinions of the ungodly (walking in the counsel of the ungodly), progresses to sinful lifestyle changes (standing in the way of sinners), and culminates in complete surrender to instruction by those that mock God (sitting in the seat of the scornful).

What today could be described as 'the counsel of the ungodly'? Consider modern cosmology; evolutionary biology; historical geology; secular psychology; contemporary opinions on the roles of men vs. women, the family, homosexual behavior, etc...

In Hebrew, 'seat' connotatively refers to a position of authoritative teaching (cf., Matt23:2), much like we would refer to a professor's "chair" today. Thus, to sit in the seat of the scornful carries the idea of receiving our instruction, or rather indoctrination, from those who scorn, scoff and mock God and His Word (2Pet3:3ff); such well describes the public schools, secular universities, and many seminaries of today!

- [2] It is not sufficient merely to shun the wicked (v1), but a positive embrace of the Godly is also required.

Here 'law' is not used denotatively as a reference to the Mosaic covenant, but connotatively to refer to the whole counsel of God (i.e., the Scriptures). The Godly man will 'delight' in God's Word; that is, God's Word will be that which brings him most joy and pleasure in life (Ps119:47-48,72). In it (i.e., God's Word) he will 'meditate day and night'. Here, 'day and night' is a merism used to mean "continually".

Note that Biblical meditation is intentional and rational "contemplation", not the mystical eastern concept which advocates an emptying of the mind and which only serves to invite demonic influence (Matt12:43-45).

Meditation upon the Word of God should be the continual activity of the Christian (Deut6:6-9; Prov6:20-22). It's precepts, principles, and even vocabulary should naturally be ours. Dr. Bullinger wrote that for the Christian to have merely a "casual" acquaintance with the Bible is a sin. The task of learning the Bible is not an arduous or burdensome chore, but should be our 'delight'. "For anything to bring the Christian more delight than God's Word is idolatry" (1Jn5:21)—Tom Pennington, Countryside Bible Church, 2006. Consistent with this, rabbis forbid the study of Scripture as part of the strict fast observed on the Day of Atonement (Lev16:29,23:27; Num29:7); purpose is to deprive oneself of that which brings pleasure.

In contrast to indoctrination by the ungodly, true education can only result from an acknowledgement of God and the truth of His Word (Prov1:7,9:10; Ps119:99; Jn17:17).

- [3] The Godly man who is continually meditating on the Word of God is 'like a tree planted by the rivers of water' ('planted' connotes intentional design; it is where it is for a reason), which is firmly grounded and by virtue of being near 'a river of water' is assured of an inexhaustible supply of nourishment that will necessarily result in fruit-bearing.

THE UNGODLY MAN

- [4] In contrast to the Godly man, the ungodly man is said to be like 'chaff', which is insubstantial, has no root and is not grounded, and is driven about by the wind (Eph4:14). When using 'chaff' as a figure for wicked men, the Bible frequently points out that its end is to be burned (Isa33:11; Matt3:12; Lk3:17), implying judgment.
- [5] Scripture repeatedly warns of a coming judgment of God (Act17:31; Jud14-15; Rev20:11-15), which the Psalmist declares the 'ungodly' and 'sinners' will not pass. All creatures ought to live their lives in view of this coming judgment.

The coming judgment, with its resulting eternal separation of the unrighteous from the righteous, is God's solution for the so-called "problem of evil". God is not impotent to solve the 'problem of evil' in His creation; He can and will, but is presently 'long-suffering' to allow for the 'repentance' and 'salvation' of many (2Pet3:9,15). The coming 'new heaven and new earth' (Rev21:1) will be a place forever free from any defilement (Rev21:27).

THE GODLY MAN VS. THE UNGODLY MAN

- [6] This verse serves to recap the preceding contrast (vv1-3 vs. vv4-5). Jehovah 'knows' the righteous or Godly man. Here, 'know' (Heb., *yada*) expresses not merely mental awareness, but personal and intimate relationship (Jn10:14-15), being used often in the OT as a euphemism for the marital relationship (e.g., Gen4:1). To not be known by God is equivalent to being lost (Matt7:22-23).

This verse is a classic occurrence of antithetic parallelism, which means that along with the explicit assertions should be understood the contrast by implication; that is, the Godly man is known by Jehovah (with the implication that the ungodly man is not known by God), and the ungodly man will perish (with the implication that the Godly man will not perish).

The Lord Jesus alluded to the two ways open to man, contrasted here in Psalm 1, when He exhorted His disciples: "Enter ye in at the strait gate: for wide is the gate, and broad is the way, that leadeth to destruction, and many there be which go in thereat: Because strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it" (Matt7:13-14).

FIGURES OF SPEECH USED IN PSALM 1 (largely taken from Bullinger)

- v1 - synonymous parallelism (with anabasis), antiptosis, heterosis, enantiosis, benedictio
- v2 - synecdoche, heterosis, merism
- v3 - ellipsis, simile
- v4 - false ellipsis, synecdoche, simile
- v5 - ellipsis
- v6 - antithetic parallelism, ellipsis, metonymy