

"The world is a severe schoolmaster, for its frowns are less dangerous than its smiles and flatteries, and it is a difficult task to keep in the path of wisdom."
—Phillis Wheatley

13-Nov-26

The Blessed Man

The book of Psalms opens with an introductory psalm that describes the righteous or blessed man in contrast to the ungodly, to sinners. The author, perhaps David, shows that one can identify such a godly person not necessarily by how much he knows or how righteous he appears, but by what he does and what he produces.

Psalm 1:1 begins the description negatively in contrast to the sinner: "Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor stands in the path of sinners, nor sits in the seat of the scornful." So instead of the psalmist writing that the righteous man believes certain truths or does particular good deeds, he tells us that a righteous person does not involve himself in things sinners do.

It is important to recognize that, in the Hebrew underlying the English of verse 1, the words "the ungodly," "sinners," and "the scornful" are all plural. This stands in comparison to the fact that the blessed "man" is singular. Right away, the psalmist is informing—if not warning—the reader that the righteous will exist as a minority among a multitude of ungodly people. He

will be relatively alone against a corrupt world, one against many. It appears as a common theme throughout Scripture. As Jesus says, "Many are called but few are chosen" (Matthew 22:14). In Luke 12:32, Jesus tells His disciples, "Do not fear, little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom." His people are frequently called a remnant (see, for example, Joel 2:32; Micah 2:12; Romans 11:5; Revelation 12:17).

Further, it is not just one against many individuals but also many banding in groups that hate God and godliness because of the influence of Satan the Devil and carnal human nature. An overview of the history of God's people demonstrates that governments, false religions, business interests, and other cabals have often set themselves against them, sometimes leading to violent persecution when the godly refuse to yield.

Nonetheless, the righteous man does not dabble in their ways. He refuses to get involved in their schemes. He stands apart from what sinners do. Thus, in this way, the psalmist tells the reader that the person who chooses the path of righteousness often walks alone. Jesus teaches the same thing in the Sermon on the Mount:

> Enter by the narrow gate; for wide is the gate and broad is the way that leads to destruction, and there are many who go in by it. Because narrow is the gate and difficult is the way which leads to life, and there are few who find it. (Matthew 7:13-14)

Psalm 1:1 contains another notable feature: an illustrative and informative progression in the wording. The verse moves from picturing a person walking, then standing, and finally sitting. The individual is shown first moving, then stationary but still on his feet, and finally not only unmoving but settled.

This progression—really a regression—depicts the advancement of sin. A righteous person, the psalmist says, avoids this path. He does not run or walk with a sinful crowd because he realizes he would end up standing with them, becoming accustomed to the ungodly lifestyle. In the end, if he continued to stand with them, he would eventually sit down among them, a full-fledged member of their crooked company.

Others say the progression of the words "counsel," "path," and "seat" also reflects this sinking deeper into sin. The individual first takes poor advice from ungodly "friends," then joins them on their path, and finally takes a seat at their table, participating in their scorn.

There may also be a progression in the words "ungodly," "sinners," and "scornful." The ungodly can be considered as those who do not know God and are simply living according to the pulls of their flesh. They are without God. Sinners, however, are those who cannot plead ignorance and are actively involved in disobedience. Finally, the scornful, representing the avowed enemies of God and the righteous, are the worst of all, disparaging and contemptuous of godliness.

The apostle James writes about a similar process of sin in James 1:14-15:

> But each one is tempted when he is drawn away by his own desires and enticed. Then, when desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, brings forth death.

Those whom God calls must reject following this disastrous path. When a person first dabbles in sin, he cannot see where it leads, and even when he progresses farther down the path, he rarely realizes his increasing peril. He may not even be aware that he is fighting against God and coming under judgment. But, as James warns, the end of a sinner's path is the grave (Romans 6:23).

Thus, the person who shuns the path of sinners is blessed. Instead, as Psalm 1:2 says, he takes pleasure in God's instruction, both in study and performance. God's words and way of life are always on his mind as he goes through the day (see Deuteronomy 6:6-9), and they fill him with joy, hope, and purpose. While he may fall short from time to time, he corrects his course and overall lives a life of happiness and satisfaction.

Psalm 1:3 describes the blessed man as "a tree planted by the rivers of water," fruitful, evergreen, and flourishing. Being planted there implies he did not grow there naturally. God intervened in his life and transplanted him into an environment where growth was possible. The rivers of water echo the many biblical instances where water symbolizes God's Spirit (see Ezekiel 36:

25-27; John 4:10; 7:37-39), which gives spiritual nourishment and strength to produce fruit that pleases God.

There is even the barest of hints from the psalmist that the blessed person has a glorious future ahead of him. A tree whose leaves do not wither may suggest eternal life, and "whatever he does shall prosper" may invoke the idea of the glorious prosperity of the Kingdom of God. Even if this psalm speaks only of this life, it leaves no doubt that the way of godliness is far superior to the path of sinners: "For the LORD knows the way of the righteous, but the way of the ungodly shall perish" (Psalm 1:6).

- Richard T. Ritenbaugh

New Transcripts

1894A: The Virtues of Patience, Endurance, and Longsuffering
Given by Ted E. Bowling on 19-Sep-26

1895: Atonement, Fasting, and Isaiah 58
Given by Richard T. Ritenbaugh on 21-Sep-26

1896B: That's Not Fair!
Given by Martin G. Collins on 10-Oct-26

FT26-00: Handwriting on the Wall (2026): Lawlessness
Given by Richard T. Ritenbaugh on 25-Sep-26

FT26-04A: The Divine Paradox: Joy Through Sacrifice!
Given by Bill Onisick on 29-Sep-26

From the Archives: Featured Sermon

From the Archives: Featured Article

Like a Tree
by Mike Ford

The psalmist writes in Psalm 1 that the blessed person "shall be like a tree planted by rivers of water" (verse 3). What characteristics of trees does God want His people to emulate? Mike Ford, who has spent many years in landscaping, shows how trees provide living illustrations of godly behavior that will prepare Christians to partake of the Tree of Life in God's Kingdom.

Featured Audio Schedule

Friday Night Bible Study
The next Bible Study (Friday 13-Nov-26) will be **How to Be a Bad Disciple** , given by **Richard T. Ritenbaugh**. The Bible Study will be featured on the CGG homepage from **6:00 pm Friday** (EST) and all day Saturday.

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