

Praying through the Psalms

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Contents

| | | |
|----------|--|----------|
| 1 | Psalm 1 | 5 |
| 1.1 | The separation of the righteous and the ungodly . . . | 5 |
| 1.1.1 | The general identification of the ungodly . . . | 5 |
| 1.1.2 | The divine separation of the ungodly | 6 |
| 1.2 | The distinguishing characteristic of the righteous . . . | 7 |
| 1.3 | The blessing of the righteous | 8 |

Chapter 1

Psalm 1

Psalm 1 is the first psalm in the book of Psalms because it forms the foundation of every believer's life. Why is this psalm so critical to the Christian life? Because it identifies what must be the distinguishing characteristic of every Christian—a delight for God's word (v. 3).

1.1 The separation of the righteous and the ungodly

The first truth we must understand from Psalm 1 is that there are only two kinds of people on earth: the righteous and the ungodly. Every human being is either a righteous or an ungodly person. Every human is either in the category of the righteous or else must be in the category of the ungodly; no one can be in both categories at the same time, and there is no third category that anyone can belong to.

1.1.1 The general identification of the ungodly

We know this to be true, first, because of the very general description of the ungodly in Psalm 1. The ungodly are very simply described

in verse 4 in this way, *The ungodly are not so*; which simply means that the ungodly man is not like the righteous man (who is described in verses 1-3)!

This means that the psalmist is not referring to some kind of extreme sinner when he uses the terms *ungodly*, *sinner*, or *scoffer*. Instead, the psalmist is simply referring to *those who are not righteous*! An equally valid translation for the word *ungodly* would be the word *unrighteous*.

This is why every human belongs to one and only one of these two groups and not to any third or fourth group—because every human must either be righteous or else, must not.

1.1.2 The divine separation of the ungodly

The second reason why we can know that everyone is either righteous or ungodly is because these two groups are divinely separated by God's judgment. Verse 5 reads,

Therefore the ungodly shall not stand in the judgement,
Nor sinners in the congregation of the righteous.

A judgment results in only two possible outcomes: you either pass the judgment, or you don't. Why is it impossible to be in both groups at the same time? Because it is impossible to both pass and fail a judgement. Instead, we will either stand in the judgement of God, or else we will not (verse 5a).

The second half of verse 5 further strengthens the notion of humanity divided into two distinct groups, because it refers to the congregation (or grouping) of the righteous which sinners are not a part of. Therefore, everyone is either one of the righteous, who have a place in this congregation of the righteous, or a sinner, who does not.

1.2 The distinguishing characteristic of the righteous

The fact that men are only divided into either the righteous or else the ungodly then begs the questions, “Who are the righteous?” and “How can I be part of the righteous?” These questions are answered in verse 1 and 2, which expose the distinguishing characteristic of the righteous.

Blessed is the man
Who walks not in the counsel of the ungodly,
Nor stands in the path of sinners,
Now sits in the seat of the scornful;
But his delight is in the law of the Lord,
And in His law he meditates day and night.

The distinguishing characteristic of the righteous man, in the negative sense, is that his life is antithetical to that of the ungodly. Verse 1 says that he does not walk in their counsels, stand in their paths, or sit in their seats. This is not to say that the righteous is isolated and has no interaction with the ungodly; rather, it means that when the righteous come in contact with the ungodly, the ungodly man is meeting someone who’s life is heading in a completely opposite direction from his own.

This contrast becomes clear as the central distinguishing characteristic of the righteous is presented in verse 2, “But his delight is in the law of the Lord.”

How is the righteous man identified? And how can we test if we are righteous men or women ourselves? Psalm 1 gives us a clear test: Do we delight in the Scripture?

The test is *not* whether we know the Bible, or simply read the Bible, or go to church to hear the Bible preached. Psalm 1 does not even identify the righteous as the one who *has delighted* in God’s Word. No, the righteous man of God is known by this primary characteristic: a joyous love and delighting in the word of God.

What is the root cause of trouble in the life of the believer? And what is origin of our sin and unfaithfulness to our Lord? Psalm 1 informs us that our root problem is our delighting in other things, over and above God's word.

And not only does Psalm 1 identify the root origin of our sin, but it also gives us the remedy for our situation: to delight in God's word.

The righteous man's delight in God's word is the overpowering characteristic of his life. Without exaggeration, we may say that he is obsessed with Scripture. Verse 2 ends, "And in His law he meditates day and night." The faithful Christian life is characterized by an all-consuming love and joy in the word of God. To what extent? To the extent that it is his continual meditation throughout each day.

1.3 The blessing of the righteous