

*Psalm 1:  
A Song of Contrasts*

All Scriptures quotations are from the 1769 KJV.

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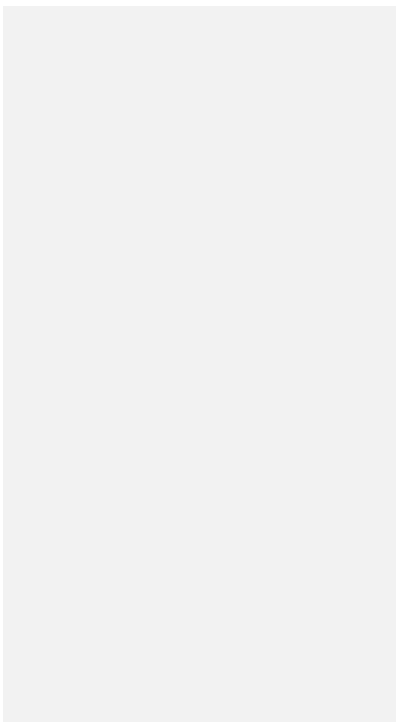
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## *Introduction*

As most know, the book of Psalms is not a book of “chapters” (as are all the other books of the Bible) but a collection of songs. They were not written to be read as we do today but were intended to be sung. It was the “hymnbook” of the early church.

Interestingly, the word “*psalms*” (plural) occurs only nine times in the Bible: three times in the Old Testament and six times in the New Testament. Three different English words are used in the Authorized Version, but all refer to either the use of various musical instruments accompanied by voice or vocal music accompanied by various musical instruments.<sup>1</sup>

The word “*psalm*” (singular) occurs eighty-eight times, eighty-five of those in the book of Psalms itself with the other three in the books of Acts

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<sup>1</sup> See Strong's #2167 (OT); #2158 (OT); #4210 (OT); #2172 (NT); #5567 (NT); #5568 (NT).

and First Corinthians. Of the eighty-five times it is found in the Book of Psalms, twenty-seven times it is italicized, meaning that it was added by the translators.

In all, there are only six Hebrew or Greek words used that are translated as *psalm* or *psalms*. In every case, both voice and musical instruments are used together.<sup>2</sup> There are some churches today that do not use musical instruments in the worship services. The primary reason is that they say that the New Testament bears no record of the use of musical instruments, particularly in the Ephesians five and Colossians three passages. However, the very use of the word “*psalm*” in both passages would indicate otherwise.

Since the book of Psalms is basically a hymnbook, it is not surprising that one finds several different musical terms and/or suggestions scattered

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<sup>2</sup> See Psalm 71:22-23 as an example.

throughout the collection. Following are some examples.

- Many psalms are directed to “*the chief musician.*” Examples include Psalms 4, 5, 6, 8, 9, and more.
- Other psalms suggest accompaniment by a particular type of musical instrument. The word “*Neginoth*” in the heading literally means “*stringed instruments.*” Examples include Psalms 4, 54, 56, 61, and 76.
- Many are referred to as “*songs.*” See Psalms 7, 18, 30, 45, 46, 48, 66, 108, and others.
- In the heading of Psalm 53 the word “*Mahalath*” is found, which refers to a temple choir.<sup>3</sup>
- The word “*Sheminith*” appears twice: in Psalms 6 and 12. The term means “*the*

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<sup>3</sup> Original Scofield Reference Bible, p.624, marginal note “h”.

*eighth*— *in music an octave.*<sup>4</sup> It may be a reference to a starting pitch. Strong's Concordance suggests that it may refer to "an eight stringed lyre."<sup>5</sup>

This opening psalm might be considered as the Prelude<sup>6</sup> to the rest of the 150 songs (or psalms) in the collection. Next to Psalm 23, it is probably the next best-known psalm, one that many adults remember memorizing in Sunday School and, hopefully, one that children today —are still learning and memorizing.

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid, p. 601, marginal note "j".

<sup>5</sup> Strong's #8067.

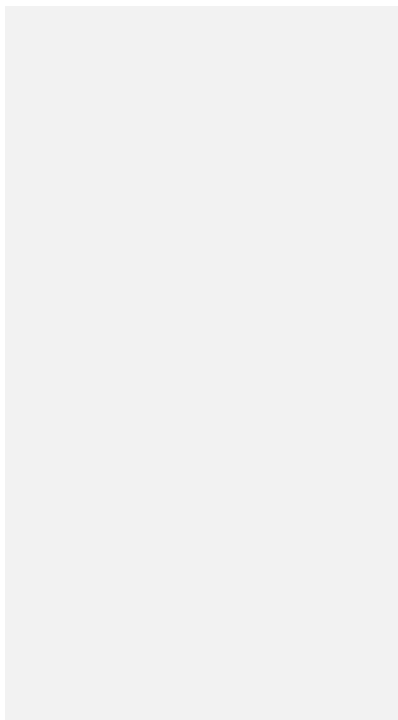
<sup>6</sup> "Something preparatory or leading up to what follows; an introductory...performance; to introduce with a prelude." New Webster's Dictionary of the English Language: School & Office Edition; Belair Publishing Company, New York, NY, 1981, p. 3909. Note: Many, if not most, morning worship services begin with a musical prelude of five to ten minutes before the actual service begins. The purpose is not to display the potential of either the musician or the instrument but to prepare hearts for the service to follow.



It is well worth noting that Psalm 1 divides into two equal parts: the first deals with the blessed man (verses one through three), while the second half (verses four through six) deals with the ungodly man by way of contrast. Throughout Scripture the doctrine of separation is consistently taught. This Psalm demonstrates the principle of separation by clearly teaching the difference between the godly and the ungodly; the righteous and the unrighteous.

In this study, we want to look beneath the surface of this familiar portion of scripture. There is a lot more than meets the casual eye or a mere devotional reading of these verses. It is my prayer and desire that the reader will be refreshed, revived, and spiritually renewed through the reading and contemplation of these pages; that each one will find himself (or herself) enjoying the life of the “blessed man” of Psalm 1.

*Ken Lynch*



## PART ONE:

### THE BLESSED MAN

*“Blessed is the man that walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor standeth in the way of sinners, nor sitteth in the seat of the scornful.*

*But his delight is in the law of the LORD; and in his law doth he meditate day and night.*

*And he shall be like a tree planted by the rivers of water, that bringeth forth his fruit in his season; his leaf also shall not wither; and whatsoever he doeth shall prosper.”* (Psalm 1:1–3)

As we begin our study, it should be noted that the term *blessed* carries with it the idea of *happiness*—yet not in the superficial way the world considers it, for the world’s happiness is based upon outer circumstances. For the child of God who is walking with, and delighting in, God, happiness can be experienced even in dark, sometimes heart-wrenching, trials. It is a deep sense of inner joy and peace *below* the surface,

even though life *on* the surface may not always be what one would like it to be. There is here a sense of spiritual satisfaction in God Himself.

While the word “*man*” generally refers to the male sex, it is here used in a general sense to refer to mankind. More specifically, it refers to the Lord’s people.

If you truly desire to know and enjoy the blessing of God in your life, there are three essential things that are emphasized in these first three verses. First, you must be *separated from the world* (v. 1). Second, you must be *strengthened by the Word*” (v. 2). And third, you must be *“situated by the water”* (v. 3).

## Chapter One

### *Separated from the World*

*"Blessed is the man that walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor standeth in the way of sinners, nor sitteth in the seat of the scornful."*  
(Psalm 1:1)

There are those today who say that we should never be negative but only positive. Well now, that is very interesting since the first verse of this psalm deals with the negative side of life, because to be blessed, there must be a separation *from* each of the things mentioned. There is a New Testament passage that also connects godliness with a negative. Paul wrote that *"The grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men, teaching us that, **denying** ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world;"* (Titus 2:11–12).

Alexander Maclaren wrote, “As long as there is so much evil in the world, and society is what it is, *godliness must be largely negative* [emphasis added], and its possessors a people whose laws are different from all people that be on the earth. Live fish swim against the stream; dead ones go with it.”<sup>7</sup>

The Bible clearly teaches the doctrine of biblical separation. While it has been (and is still) ignored, attacked, repudiated, rejected, and denounced by many—even by some who claim to be fundamental in their doctrine—yet its importance remains. While it is not a doctrine that affects a person’s relation to the Lord in salvation, it is nonetheless a doctrine to be heeded and practiced. Biblical separation is introduced to the reader in the fourth verse of the first chapter of the Bible: Genesis 1:4. There we find this statement: “*And God saw the light, that it was good: and God **divided** the light from*

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<sup>7</sup> *The Expositor's Bible: Psalms*: Jennings & Graham: Cincinnati, 1892, Vol. 1, p. 2.

*the darkness.*” Then we find in the latter part of Leviticus 20:24, “*I am the LORD your God, which have **separated** you from other people.*” A few verses later, we find the words, “*...I have **severed** you from other people that ye should be mine*” (Lev. 20:26).

The purpose of Biblical separation is to maintain a distinction between right and wrong, good and evil, daylight and darkness, etc. While it is true that many fundamentalists seem to over-emphasize the negative side of separation, (i.e. what we are against), it needs to be understood that what one stands against is the effect, not the cause. The basis of Biblical separation is rooted in the holiness of God. That is the cause. The effect is the result. The believer is exhorted to separate himself *unto* God and the natural result of that is separation *from* all that displeases God.

There are two primary areas of separation taught in the Bible. The first is what is known as *Ecclesiastical Separation*. The word *ecclesiastical* comes from the Greek *ecclesia*, meaning “called out ones” and refers to the Church made up of

those who have been called out of the world through salvation. The Biblical teaching is found in such verses as:

*“Can two walk together except they be agreed?”*  
(Amos 3:3)

*“Wherefore come out from among them and be ye separate saith the Lord...”* (II Corinthians 6:17)

*“If there come any unto you, and bring not this doctrine, receive him not into your house, neither bid him God speed: For he that biddeth him God speed is partaker of his evil deeds.”* (II John 10–11)

Examples might be separation from ecumenical evangelism and organizations that compromise with unbelief such as Promise Keepers, and so on.

A second area of separation taught in the Bible is that of *personal separation*, involving individual believers separating from the world in such areas as attitudes, amusements, attire, associations, activities, and such like.



Here in Psalm 1, David presents three different aspects of personal separation. First, by not walking in the counsel of the ungodly; second, by not standing in the way of sinners; and third, by not sitting in the seat of the scornful.

### **“Walking Not”**

The word *walk* in its context here refers to one’s lifestyle, or, as the New Scofield Bible renders it, “manner of living.” There are two words in our English Bible denoting the believer’s lifestyle; “*walk*” and “*conversation*.” The term “*walk*” is used in both the Old and New testaments. The term “*conversation*” is used exclusively in the New Testament.

The Apostle Paul uses the term “*walk*” in a positive way in Galatians 5:16 where he writes, “*Walk in the Spirit and ye shall not fulfil the lusts of the flesh.*” Now, what does it mean to “*walk in the Spirit*?” To be sure, it has nothing to do with an emotional, supernatural, ecstatic type of charismatic experience. It simply means to live

one's daily life as a Christian filled by, led by, guided by, empowered by the Holy Spirit as that believer willingly yields to the controlling power of the Holy Spirit on a daily basis.

Paul then goes on to say that when one *is* walking (or living) that way he will have victory over sin (not fulfilling the lusts, or appetites, of the flesh). It must be understood that the flesh, as used in the New Testament, does not refer to one's physical body but, rather, to that immaterial part of man's being that is constantly at war with God. The flesh is not the friend of a believer but is a terrible enemy seeking only to have its own appetites satisfied, regardless of the consequences.

Note carefully that when you are walking in the Spirit (i.e. filled by and controlled by), not only will you **not** sin, you **cannot** sin! Hang on to your hat—I am *not* teaching the errant doctrine of sinless perfection whereby one can reach a state of spirituality in this life where he is unable to ever sin again. The fact is, we all sin. That is why God gave the wonderful assurance that "*If we*

*confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.*" (1 John 1:9) When a believer sins, it is expressly because, at the moment that the sin occurred, he was *not* walking in the Spirit but in the flesh. And when one walks (lives) in the flesh he will always find himself in sin.

In Psalm One, David uses the term in a negative way: "**not walking in the counsel of the ungodly.**" The word for *counsel* means the advice, the direction of, or the world view of those who are not saved and therefore have no understanding of the spiritual dimension of life.

Allow me a couple of personal illustrations. When I was in high school and my guidance counselor found out that I was going to attend Bob Jones University to major in Music Education, he very strongly urged me not to do it. He knew nothing of this "small, unknown southern school that nobody ever heard of" and was sure that if I went there I would never be able to get a job teaching anywhere. On the other hand, if I went to a nearby major university that was renowned for

its music program, I could get a job teaching anywhere and for a good wage, too. He, no doubt, was thinking of what he thought was best for me without understanding the will of God for my life. It was at BJU that God called me to preach and led me into the ministry.

Another example is fitting to share here as well. One summer, after my freshman year of college and after the Lord called me to preach, I had the unique opportunity to study the viola with a world-renowned violist by the name of Max Aranoff. He was a kind man and an excellent teacher. He was a member of the famous Curtis String Quartet and taught at the Curtis Institute of Music in downtown Philadelphia. But he was not a Christian. He did not understand the call of God on my life. Once he challenged me something to the effect of, “Ken, forget about this Bobby Jones place (I think he thought it was named after the old golfer). You give me two years of your life, six days a week, eight hours a day and I will personally guarantee you a seat in the Philadelphia Orchestra!” The Lord helped me

through that by helping me to love the violin more than the viola. The more I played viola, the less I liked it. God was at work. And He still had a lot to do! More later.

The point I am seeking to make here is this. You can never know the joy and peace of God if you are going to build your life on the principles of life of those who may be well-meaning, but who are not saved.

### **“Standing Not”**

I was personally fascinated to discover from a word study that this phrase, *“not standing in the way of sinners,”* has more to do with an attitude than with an action. It does not necessarily mean that you are standing where sinners are standing and doing what they do. Rather, it has the idea of wishing you could be there, having a desire to be there but knowing that you can't. Where would you rather be, if you could, than where you are right now?

Satan knows what instinctively attracts you and gets your attention. He knows your every weakness and will stop at nothing to get you to do what your flesh might enjoy but what will certainly grieve the Holy Spirit. While there is much in the world that is sin and sinful, not everything is. Sometimes the Devil will use something that is basically good and harmless if he thinks it will take you away from God even a little space.

Here is another personal illustration. I was saved at the age of fifteen in April of 1962. Having been reared in an independent, Bible-believing Baptist church, I had been exposed to many different evangelists and missionaries. I frequently heard about the importance of “dedicating” my life to the Lord. So, I did. Or so I thought. But there was one thing that I did not give to the Lord—my music. I loved my music and was not willing to part with it. You see, in almost every series of meetings the preacher would take one service and give his testimony about his conversion. Again, and again I heard about what they “gave”

to the Lord. Each time, the Lord “took what they gave out of their life.” I was not getting the real message. All I was getting was that whatever you give to the Lord He takes. So, I wasn’t taking any chances. If I didn’t offer it, maybe He wouldn’t take it away. In essence, I was saying, “Lord, You can have this and that, but not my music.” I never said it consciously, but the attitude was there just the same. Over time, I became miserable, knowing I had not given God my all.

In the spring of 1967 I purchased my 1767 Luigi Marconcini violin. What a prize it was! At the time, I was performing with the Springfield Symphony Orchestra in one of the Philadelphia suburbs near home. It was a wonderful musical experience that I will always remember. On this one spring night, we were presenting a concert to a near sold-out crowd. The first number on the program was the famous Adagio for Strings by Samuel Barber, one of the most exquisite pieces ever written for string orchestra.

I have no idea who, but somebody choreographed a ballet to the Adagio for two dancers. I was too taken with the music during rehearsals to take notice of the “ballet” part. However, on the night of the performance, I happened to take just a quick glance up on the stage and was shocked by what I saw! The male dancer’s hands were all over that woman’s body in places no man should have touched but a husband.

It was then that the Lord renewed His dealings with me. It was as though He said, “Hey, Ken. Did you see that? Do you think that honors Me? You know you are a part of that immorality, don’t you? You’re playing for it! How about giving your music to me after all?” My mental response was something like, “Lord, this is neither the time nor the place. We’ll talk about it later.” To which His response was, “No, we’ll talk about it right here and now.”



Tears began to fill my eyes as the music on the page became a blur. Somehow, I managed to get through the piece. When it was finally over, and while the conductor was taking his bows, I grabbed the music off the stand, took my violin and walked off the stage, never to return. I went backstage where our cases were. Out of the corner of my eye I could see my future wife standing quietly in the corner watching me. Somehow, I think she knew and was praying for me.

Sobbing, I placed my violin back in the case and said, "Lord, it's Yours. You can have it. I am miserable, and I can't go on like this. It's Yours." God is my witness that when I closed the lid on my violin case that night, I had no idea if I would ever take it out and play it again. But that night, it didn't matter anymore. It was God's! Little did I know then that God, in His grace, was not only going to let me keep my violin (I still have and play it), He was going to multiply my musical ministry several times over.

Commented [K1]:

While there is just about everything wrong with “rock” music, there is nothing wrong with good, wholesome classical music.<sup>8</sup> The problem was that my music had become an idol; something that I was not willing to give up. In that way, I found myself “*standing in the way of sinners*” living for myself and what I wanted rather than for God and what He wanted. We must be willing to let go and trust that He knows best.

Paul’s exhortation in I Corinthians 6 is, “*What? know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost which is in you, which ye have of God, and ye are not your own? For ye are bought with a price: therefore, glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God’s.*” (I Corinthians 6:19-20) In other words, you don’t belong to you, and I don’t belong to me. If saved, we both belong to God. And that means all of us; dreams, aspirations, desires, talents—all.

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<sup>8</sup> Not all that passes for “classical” music is good or wholesome. Just because some styles of music are performed by an orchestra does not make it good music.

## “Sitting Not”

The final phrase is *“sitting not in the seat of the scornful.”* This means to occupy a place with as a part of those who mock, ridicule, make fun of and denounce the things of God.<sup>9</sup>

David said, *“I have not sat with vain persons, neither will I go in [with] dissemblers. I have hated the congregation of evil doers; and will not sit with the wicked”* (Ps. ~~alm~~ 26:4-5). In Proverbs 14:9<sup>7</sup> we read, *“Fools make a mock of sin.”* The Prophet Jeremiah said, *“I sat not in the assembly*

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<sup>9</sup> The word for “sitting” means “properly to *sit* down (specifically as judge, in ambush, in quiet); by implication to  *dwell, to remain*” (Strong’s H3427) while the word for “seat” (coming from the a variation of the same word) refers to “figuratively a  *site; abstractly a session; by extension an abode* (the place or the time); by implication  *population: - assembly, dwell in, dwelling (-place), wherein (that) dwelt (in), inhabited place, seat, sitting, situation, sojourning.*” (Strong’s H4186)

*of the wicked"* (Jeremiah 15:17). I would wonder how many professing Christians do, in fact, sit in the seat of the scornful at times, if by nothing else than cowardly silence, not speaking out when they should. While most truly born-again Christians cringe (inside anyway) when the name of Christ is used as profanity, many say nothing by way of rebuke! We turn our heads away, wish we had not heard it, yet-but say nothing! That kind of silence gives a silent nod of approval, thereby placing the silent one in the seat of the scorners. It does not mean that a Christian necessarily uses scornful, mocking language toward God himself, but he tolerates those who do.

One summer, I had a job working in a shipyard. Never in my life had I been so surrounded by such profane and immoral persons. One of my co-workers was extremely profane. It seemed that almost every other word out of his mouth was either profane or obscene. It greatly bothered me, but for several months I said nothing. I just

felt sorry for the man. But his language could not have been more offensive to me. All that time, I was guilty of occupying a place in the seat of the scornful.

Finally, one day I had had enough. When he let out his string of profanity, I turned to him and said, "Friend, may I correct your theology?" He did not even know what theology was, much less that his needed correction. I continued, "God is not in the business of damning; He's in the business of saving." Then I turned and walked away while he stood there with his mouth open. To my recollections, I do not ever remember that man swearing around me again for the rest of the time that I worked there.

### **A Study in the Life of Lot**

Lot, the nephew of Abram, is a perfect picture of one who found himself sitting in the seat of the scornful. Genesis 13 gives the record ~~of the~~

~~separation of of~~ Lot's separation from Abram. Verse twelve tells us that Lot "*pitched his tent toward Sodom.*" The next verse says that "*the men of Sodom were wicked and sinners before the LORD exceedingly.*" And we know what that sin was: homosexuality! The important thing to notice here is the phrase "*toward Sodom.*" As mentioned earlier, here is a man who was wishing for something other than what he had. The next chapter finds him actually *doing* that something else. In Chapter Fourteen, King Chedorlaomer (and four other kings) attacked Sodom and Gomorrah, taking many captives. Included in those captives was Lot. "*And they took Lot, Abram's brother's son, who dwelt in Sodom...*" (14:12).

Move on now to Genesis 19 and notice verse one: "*And there came two angels to Sodom at even; and Lot sat in the gate of Sodom...*" The key phrase here is "*sat in the gate of Sodom.*" The gate of the city was more than just an entrance and exit. Henry Morris explains that it was "the

**Commented [K2]:** You should comment on the "wishing you were there" attitude here. First he wished it, then he did it.

place where the business and commercial activities centered, and where the judicial councils took place. Evidently, Lot himself was now some kind of *magistrate* (emphasis mine) of the place, for this seems to be the meaning of the term 'sitting in the gate.'<sup>10</sup> Griffith Thomas puts it this way, "...Lot was sitting in the gate, the place of concourse, the place of importance. It is not improbable that he sat there in an official capacity as judge."<sup>11</sup>

Now we go to II Peter, Chapter 2. Allow me to jump into the middle of a lengthy apostolic sentence to look at just the part that deals with Lot. *"And turning the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah into ashes condemned them with an overthrow, making them an ensample [example] unto those that after should live ungodly; and*

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<sup>10</sup> *The Genesis Record*, by Henry M. Morris; Baker Book House, Grand Rapids, MI, 1961, p. 345.

<sup>11</sup> *Genesis: A Devotional Commentary* by W.H. Griffith Thomas, W. B. Erdmans Publishing Co., Grand Rapids, MI, 1963, p. 171.

*delivered **just** [righteous] Lot, vexed [tormented] with the filthy conversation [lifestyle] of the wicked: (for that **righteous man** dwelling among them, in seeing and hearing, vexed his **righteous soul** from day to day with their unlawful deeds;”* (II Peter 2:6–8).

Here is Lot, a *just* man, in his standing with God. Twice the word *righteous* is used with reference to Lot. A *righteous man* and his *righteous soul*. Yes, I believe Lot is in heaven today. But his life stands in stark contrast with that of Abram, also known as the father of faith. Abraham pictures a *spiritual* man and Lot a *carnal* man. Lot, as a man of God who knew better, lived in that wicked and perverse society *as an official of the city*, knowing in his heart that what he saw and heard could not have been more wrong. One of his many problems was that there is no record that he ever once opened his mouth to rebuke the sin or try to stop it. What he saw and heard every day literally ate him up on the inside. He was tormented day and night by the wicked sins of



that evil place, but never tried to stop it. He was an example of salt that had lost its savor (Luke 14:34).

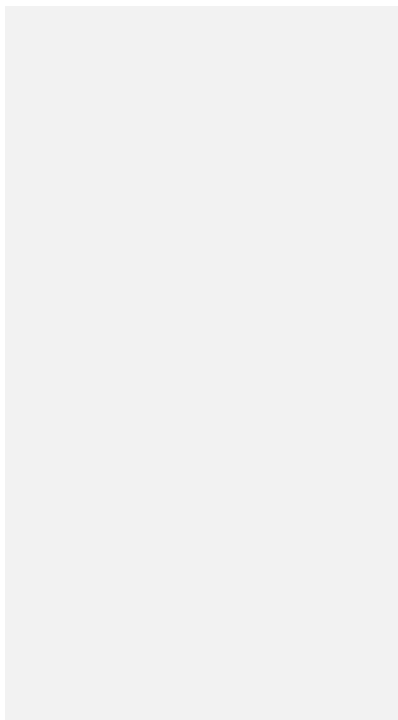
Walking, standing, sitting. All seem so harmless. All can help or hurt. Walking involves *passing*. Be careful where you walk.<sup>12</sup> Standing involves *peering*.<sup>13</sup> Be careful what you watch. Sitting involves *participating*.<sup>14</sup> Be careful with whom you walk. Remember that David said, “*I have hated the congregation of evil doers; and will not sit with the wicked*” (Ps. 26:4). Notice David’s “*will not*.” May God help all of us to “*will not*” when it comes to sin and following the counsel of the ungodly.

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<sup>12</sup> Cf. Ephesians 2:10

<sup>13</sup> Cf. Psalm 101:3; Ephesians 6:13; I Corinthians 16:13; II Timothy 2:22

<sup>14</sup> Cf. Ephesians 2:6; Psalm 26:5; Jeremiah 15:17



## Chapter Two

### *Strengthened by the Word*

*"But his delight is in the law of the LORD; and in his law doth he meditate day and night."*  
(Psalm 1:2)

Verse two begins with the word *but*—a conjunction. That is, it ties verse two back to verse one by way of contrast. The pronoun *his* takes you back to the *blessed man* in verse one. In other words, the child of God who is truly blessed, does not, indeed cannot, delight in the things of verse one but rather in the things of verse two.

Dr. Alexander McClaren once said that "delight in the law [i.e. the Word of God] will deliver [one] from delight in the counsel of the wicked."<sup>15</sup> Commenting on verse two, and

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<sup>15</sup> *The Expositor's Bible: Psalms*: Jennings & Graham: Cincinnati, 1892, Vol. 1, p. 3.

tying it beautifully together with verse one, he writes in his Expositions of Holy Scripture, “Our text may be translated as a joyful exclamation, ‘Oh, the blessedness of the man – whose delight is in the law of the Lord.’”<sup>16</sup> Matthew Henry wrote, “We need not court the fellowship of sinners, either for pleasure or for improvement, while we have fellowship with the Word of God and with God himself in and by his word.”<sup>17</sup>

The Psalmist said, “*The statutes of the LORD are right, rejoicing the heart: the commandment of the LORD is pure, enlightening the eyes.*” (Psalm 19:8) Consider the following verses found in Psalm 119 — “*O how love I thy law! it is my meditation all the day...*” (v. 97) and “*How sweet are thy words unto my taste! yea, sweeter than honey to my mouth!*” (v. 103)

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<sup>16</sup> *Expositions of Holy Scripture*; Alexander McClaren, Baker Book House, Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1982, Vol. 4, p. 8.

<sup>17</sup> *Matthew Henry's Commentary*; Matthew Henry, Fleming H. Revell Co., New York, Vol. III, p. 239.

Paul, in writing to young Pastor Timothy exhorted him to *“give attention to reading, to exhortation, to doctrine.”* (1 Timothy 4:13) From the context, Paul was not necessarily talking about the reading of books and literature, though there is a place for that, but rather stressing the importance of the reading of the Word of God. There are many these days who read books, commentaries, devotional guides, *about* the Bible but who seldom read the Bible itself. May I say that there is *no* substitute for the reading of the Bible. Yes, do read other books, but don't allow the writings of others, even good, doctrinally sound men, to take the place of the Scriptures!

Jeremiah, known as the “weeping prophet”, put it this way, *“Thy words were found, and I did eat them; and thy word was unto me the joy and rejoicing of mine heart...”* (Jeremiah 15:16)

The question we must ask ourselves is simply, *“How much is the Word of God the joy and rejoicing of our hearts?”* The answer is not complicated but very simple; only to the

degree to which we spend time in its pages reading, studying, devouring, memorizing and seeking to live it.

Though it has been several years now, I read a study done by George Barna in a book entitled, "What Americans Believe." The entire volume was a series of surveys he conducted about Americans and their religious beliefs. One part caught my attention because I had personally conducted a very similar survey over a two-year period in some sixty fundamental, separatist churches. While his survey covered the broader spectrum of "evangelicalism", the results were almost identical. And they were shocking! At that time, approximately 80–85% of professing Christians had *never*, not once, in their entire Christian life, read through the entire Bible from beginning to end. What was even more disturbing was the fact that approximately the same percentage (give or take a point here and there) do not even spend as little as fifteen minutes a day reading their Bibles, much less studying it! And of those who do read their Bibles

for fifteen minutes or more a day, most of them only do so devotionally. Yet, the Bible clearly states that we who claim to be Christians are *commanded* (for it is in the imperative) not only to read but to *“study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth.”* (II Timothy 2:15) Grammatically, the “you” is understood. Who is to study? You!

Allow me a brief “rabbit trail” here. Note the phrase *“rightly dividing the word of truth”*, referring to the Bible. If it is possible to *rightly* divide the Word, it is also possible to *wrongly* divide the Word of Truth. As an example, take the little children’s chorus that goes like this: “Every promise in the Book is mine; every chapter, every verse, every line.” It’s a nice little musical ditty, but it is not scripturally sound. *Some* of the promises are mine, but not all.

The promises of God fall into three headings and some subheadings: *past*, *present*, and *future*. *Past* promises are found primarily in the Old Testament and deal mainly with Israel such as the

promise of the physical land made to Abraham in Genesis Twelve. The promises to Israel have nothing to do with the Church during the Dispensation of Grace. The Church is *not* spiritual Israel. Rather, it is a uniquely different entity, dispensationally. *Future* promises, again dealing with Israel, the Tribulation and Millennium, are found in both the Old and New Testaments. However, the *present* promises for the Church today are found almost exclusively in the writings of the Apostle Paul.

Under the heading of *present* promises, we find that there are two subheadings: unconditional and conditional. One example of each will suffice.

First, an unconditional promise. "*For whosoever shall call on the name of the Lord shall be saved,*" found in Romans 10:13, is an unconditional promise to all who will call on the name of the Lord. Call and be saved! That is the promise of God.

Now, a conditional promise. In Philippians 4:19 we find these words, "*But my God shall supply all*



*your need according to his riches in glory by Christ Jesus.*” There are those who look to this promise in a way that is not consistent with scripture. The context must be considered. This verse is not saying that God is arbitrarily going to give you anything you want. Or even that He will necessarily cause you to prosper. To understand the meaning of this verse, you must go back to verse ten and read through to verse nineteen.

*<sup>10</sup> But I rejoiced in the Lord greatly, that now at the last your care of me hath flourished again; wherein ye were also careful, but ye lacked opportunity.*

*<sup>11</sup> Not that I speak in respect of want: for I have learned, in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content.*

*<sup>12</sup> I know both how to be abased, and I know how to abound: everywhere and in all things I am instructed both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need.*

*<sup>13</sup> I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me.*

<sup>14</sup> *Notwithstanding ye have well done, that ye did communicate with my affliction.*

<sup>15</sup> *Now ye Philippians know also, that in the beginning of the gospel, when I departed from Macedonia, no church communicated with me as concerning giving and receiving, but ye only.*

<sup>16</sup> *For even in Thessalonica ye sent once and again unto my necessity.*

<sup>17</sup> *Not because I desire a gift: but I desire fruit that may abound to your account.*

<sup>18</sup> *But I have all, and abound: I am full, having received of Epaphroditus the things which were sent from you, an odour of a sweet smell, a sacrifice acceptable, well-pleasing to God.*

<sup>19</sup> *But my God shall supply all your need according to his riches in glory by Christ Jesus.*

The key to a proper understanding of verse nineteen is found in the preceding nine verses. Verses ten through eighteen are the *cause* and verse nineteen is the *effect*. At least five times in these verses Paul refers to their giving in support

of his ministry, even to the point of sacrificial giving. They gave to Paul's ministry without giving a second thought to their own needs and they gave in the right spirit. Paul describes that kind of giving as "*an odour of a sweet smell, a sacrifice acceptable, well-pleasing to God.*" It is expressly because of *how* they gave, as well as *what* they gave that results in the wonderful promise of verse nineteen. In other words, Paul is saying, "Folks, because you gave so sacrificially, not even considering your own needs, do not worry. God will take care of your need [and he didn't stop there but added] according to His riches in glory!" Wow!

Some years back I was in a discussion with a friend who was really struggling financially. During our conversation he mentioned that he was not tithing. I responded by saying, "Maybe that is part of the problem. You haven't been tithing and God hasn't been blessing." He said, "I can't afford to tithe!" My response was, "No, you can't afford *not* to tithe." When you give to God with the right heart attitude, He will take care of

your needs; not all your wants, but your needs. And according to His riches in glory. Try it for yourself, if you aren't already.

Now back to our main study. Some who were a part of that high percentage of non-Bible readers would offer this explanation: "Yes, I admit that I don't read my Bible very much. Frankly, there's so much of it that I don't understand." My response to that is, "Does *not* reading it give you any *better* understanding of it?" My friends, I freely admit to you that there is much in the Bible that I don't understand, either. But, I'll tell you what I learned many years ago. I stopped worrying about what I didn't understand, began thanking God for what I *did* understand, and kept at it. And do you know what happened? The more I read, the more I understood! The big reason people know so little about the Bible is that they spend so little time with the Bible.

Let me make the following suggestion for your Bible reading. What I am suggesting applies primarily to the New Testament epistles. Remember that epistles are letters that were

intended to be read aloud in the churches. Letters should be read all the way through, not merely a phrase here and there, which is the way a great many Christians read their Bibles; a verse or two here and there. The gospels and the book of Acts are narratives and so can be read incident by incident. Beginning with the book of Romans, I recommend that you get alone, away from the TV, phone, kids, etc., and read the entire book at one sitting. That's right—from Chapter 1 all the way through to the end of Chapter 16. If you need help with your concentration, read it aloud. It may take a little while the first time.

Here's what will happen, if you keep at it: after reading the epistle through several times from beginning to end, you will begin to get a "bird's eye" view of the purpose as well as the content of the letter. (When you read just a little bit here and there, you miss the overall intent.) After a while, it will begin to make sense to you. Trust me. It works. *If* you keep at it.

The only way a Christian can grow spiritually is through a knowledge of the Word of God. And

that begins with reading it while asking God for comprehension through the Holy Spirit.

Let's consider first the *milk* of the Word.

### **The Milk of the Word**

In First Peter 2:2 we read, *“As newborn babes, desire the sincere milk of the word, that ye may grow thereby.”* Just as a newborn infant's growth (and health) depends upon a good supply of healthy milk, so too, the newborn babe in Christ can only grow into the spiritual adult God wants him to be by starting with the “milk of the Word.”

While you and I may enjoy a mouth-watering, grilled, juicy medium steak, the same meat would kill a newborn baby. His body is not able to digest it, not to mention the fact that he has no teeth with which to chew it! As we all began our physical life on physical milk, so it is with a new Christian. Not yet spiritually able to understand the deeper and more difficult things of the Bible (and there are plenty), he needs to begin with the

simpler things, the easier things to understand before he moves on to the meat of the Word. That is why most Christian workers suggest that a new convert begin his Bible reading time with the Gospel of John, a narrative on the life of Christ. That being done, it is often suggested that he start with the Gospel of Matthew and progressively read through the entire New Testament. Only then is it suggested that he go back and start at Genesis and read the Old Testament, with the understanding that there will be much that will not be understood. But, if he keeps at it, it will begin to make sense over time. It takes patience and perseverance but pays big dividends!

### **The Meat of the Word**

Just as a child moves from the milk to real food and ultimately on to strong meat, so does the new Christian begin his spiritual life as a babe. As he is in the Word, he begins to grow until he reaches the point where he can digest the “meat of the Word.” A key passage with this idea in

mind is found in Hebrews Chapter Five and verses ten through fourteen. There we read that Christ is

<sup>10</sup> *“Called of God an high priest after the order of Melchisedec.*

<sup>11</sup> *Of whom we have many things to say, and hard to be uttered, seeing ye are dull of hearing.*

<sup>12</sup> *For when for the time ye ought to be teachers, ye have need that one teach you again which be the first principles of the oracles of God; and are become such as have need of milk, and not of strong meat.*

<sup>13</sup> *For every one that useth milk is unskillful in the word of righteousness: for he is a babe.*

<sup>14</sup> *But strong meat belongeth to them that are of full age, even those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil.”*

The phrase *“of whom”* in verse eleven is a reference back to the Old Testament King of Salem named Melchisedec, who was a type of



Christ. The writer informs his readers that he had a great deal to say to them about this typology but was unable to do so because they were “*dull of hearing;*” (i.e., they were spiritually unable to hear those things with understanding). I have often wondered just what he wanted to share with the Hebrew Christians. We’ll never know this side of heaven because the Christians to whom he was writing were not able to handle it, so he didn’t write it. In verse twelve, the writer reminds them that they had become so far backslidden (suggested by the phrase *and are become...*) that they needed to be taught the very basics—again. Instead of teaching, they needed to be taught. He further reminds his readers that they had been saved long enough to where they should have been teachers of the Word. Instead, they were still needing to be spiritually bottle-fed and diaper-changed; a sure sign of spiritual immaturity.

In verse thirteen, the case of spiritual infancy is clearly stated. Those who are continually using

milk “are unskillful in the Word of righteousness; for he is a babe!”

Verse fourteen speaks about (1) the strong meat of the Word itself; (2) those to whom it belongs; and (3) the result of strong meat.

First, the term *strong meat*. The two words put together in both Greek and English convey the meaning of “solid, stable nourishment.”<sup>18</sup> This goes beyond the simple milk of the Word. It is sad but true that there is a multitude of Christians who claim to have been saved for twenty or more years who have never been able to take the “strong meat.” There are many who live virtually their entire Christian life as spiritual babies.

Second, those to whom the strong meat belongs. It refers to those that are *of full age*, not in years but in spiritual development, and have become mature Christians. Notice the phrase, “*even those who by reason of use*”; literally, those who by *habitual* use; that is, constant use. It is through

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<sup>18</sup> Strong’s G4731 and G5160.

this constant, habitual use that these who can take the strong meat have their spiritual senses exercised.

Third, we see the result of the strong meat. The result of this kind of spiritual growth through the Word is spiritual maturity; being able “to discern [tell the difference] both [or between] good and evil”; or what pleases God and what displeases Him. This kind of discernment is a natural by-product of spiritual maturity.<sup>19</sup>

### **Meditation in the Word**

The word *meditate* conveys the idea of pondering; giving constant, deliberate thought to what has been read. The *American College Dictionary* defines meditation as “continued thought or contemplation,” giving synonyms such as “ponder, muse, ruminare, cogitate, think” for the verb “meditate.” One writer says, “Meditation chews the cud, and gets the

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<sup>19</sup> See also 1 Corinthians 3 for Paul’s discussion of the natural, spiritual and carnal man and Philipians 1:9-10.

sweetness and nutritive virtue of the Word into the heart and life; this is the way the godly bring forth much fruit."<sup>20</sup>

The word *meditate* is found only fourteen times in the entire Bible (KJV). Nine of those times it references the scriptures. The word *meditation* occurs only six times, of which two speak of the Word and the other four speak of the heart. Here is a chronological sampling of those verses.

*"This book of the law shall not depart out of thy mouth; but thou shalt meditate therein day and night, that thou mayest observe to do according to all that is written therein: for then thou shalt make thy way prosperous, and then thou shalt have good success."* (Joshua 1:8)

*"I will meditate in thy precepts and have respect unto thy ways."* (Psalm 119:15)

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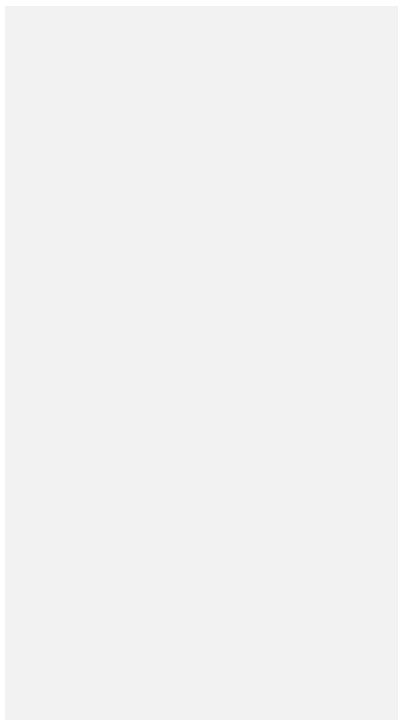
<sup>20</sup> Bartholomew Ashwood's *Heavenly Trade*; 1688, quoted in *The Treasury of David* by Charles Spurgeon, Vol.1, p. 7; Baker Book House edition, 1981.

*“Let the words of my mouth, and the meditation of my heart, be acceptable in thy sight, O LORD, my strength, and my redeemer.” (Psalm 19:14)*

*“O how love I thy law! it is my meditation all the day.” (Psalm 119:97)*

*“Meditate upon these things; give thyself wholly to them; that thy profiting may appear to all.” (I Timothy 4:15)*

Meditation takes time and some conscious effort. Just like a cow chews the cud for hours, gleaning every ounce of nutrition out of the grass that is possible, so meditation in and on the scriptures seeks to glean as much as possible from a particular text or passage, asking for the Holy Spirit’s guidance and gift of understanding. Don’t just read a passage from your Bible and go away saying, “Oh, that’s nice.” Read until the Lord speaks to you from a specific verse, or even a phrase; then ruminate, cogitate, think about, *meditate* on that thought throughout the day. You may be surprised what you learn.



## Chapter Three

### *Situated by the Water*

*“And he shall be like a tree planted by the rivers of water, that bringeth forth his fruit in his season; his leaf also shall not wither; and whatsoever he doeth shall prosper”.* (Psalm 1:3)

Observe with me three primary thoughts in this verse: it is a *Place of Planting*, a *Place of Productivity* and a *Place of Prosperity*.

#### **A Place of Planting**

*“And he shall be like a tree **planted** by the rivers of water”* (Psalm 1:3a).

The word *planted* denotes a deliberate act of cultivation. Unlike a seed that falls from the beak of a bird flying overhead that grows where it fell, we have here someone (a planter) who chose where to put the seed, in this case a tree. It also

suggests a sense of stability; unwavering like many plants.

Obviously, in the context, the *tree* (not a shrub or a plant but a tree due to its firmness) refers to the *blessed man* of verse one; the *planter* [or gardener] is God; and the *planted* refers to what is often called the Will of God for His children. Clearly, the tree (the Christian) does not get to choose where it is going to be planted; the gardener (God) chooses. Clearly then, God puts us where He wants us to be. When it comes to the Will of God, either we are *in* His Will or *out* of it. We don't have the option to tell God what we're going to be, do or say and then ask Him to bless it. God's blessing and His Will are inseparable. His blessing hinges on our being in His Will and our being in His Will results in His blessing.

*The Psalmist said that "the steps of a good man are **ordered** by the LORD: and he delighteth in his way."* (Psalm 37:23) The word ordered means planned, ordained, determined, mapped out, etc. God has already mapped out and planned



the path in life that each of us is to take. He has established or ordained it already. The Psalmist also notes that God's pathway is a pleasant one that brings great delight. That is not to say, however, that there will not be difficulties and hard times. But His grace has been promised to be sufficient for whatever circumstance He brings your way. (II Corinthians 12:9)

*"Blessed is the man that trusteth in the LORD, and whose hope the LORD is. For he shall be as a tree planted by the waters, and that spreadeth out her roots by the river, and shall not see when heat cometh, but her leaf shall be green; and shall not be careful in the year of drought, neither shall cease from yielding fruit."* (Jeremiah 17:7-8)

You will notice in both Psalm 1:3 and Jeremiah 17:8 that there is a mention of *rivers* in the plural, suggesting irrigation. Spurgeon writes, "This is an allusion to the Eastern method of cultivation, by which rivulets of water are made to flow between rows of trees, and thus, by artificial means, the trees receive a constant supply of

moisture.”<sup>21</sup> In other words, there will never be a lack in the supply of the “tree” that is planted where God wants it to be. No matter who you are, where you are, or what you are, if you are in God’s Will for your life, your needs, not necessarily your *wants*, will all be supplied...” (Philippians 4:19) A Christian who is *not* what, where, or who God wants him to be does *not* have the assurance that all will be well or that all his needs will be supplied.

### **A Place of Productivity**

*“That bringeth forth his fruit in his season; his leaf also shall not wither...”* (Psalm 1:3b)

God desires us who are His children by faith in Jesus Christ (Galatians 3:26) to be fruit-bearing people. Recall the words of the Lord Jesus in John 15 when he said to His disciples, *“Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of*

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<sup>21</sup> *The Treasury of David* by Charles Spurgeon, Vol.1, p. 7; Baker Book House edition, 1981

*itself, except it abide in the vine; no more can ye, except ye abide in me. I am the vine, ye are the branches: He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit: for without me ye can do nothing.”* (John 15:4–5)

There are several different kinds of fruit mentioned in the Bible. For example, there is the *fruit of salvation* (Colossians 1:4–6), the *spiritual fruit* (Philippians 4:17), the *fruit of service* (James 3:17–18), the *fruit of the Spirit* (Galatians 5:22), the *fruit of souls* (Psalm 126:5–6; Romans 1:13), and the *fruit of subsistence* [financial help] (Romans 15:28).

While not all trees bear the same fruit, or even the same amount of fruit, the point is that a good tree bears its fruit in its season.

Interestingly, the reference to the health of the tree is mentioned only after the desired fruit is mentioned. *“His leaf also shall not wither.”* You see, the condition of the leaf is indicative of the health of the tree. If the leaf is withered, whatever fruit there is will not be good fruit.

Spurgeon comments, "The Lord's trees are all evergreens. No winter's cold can destroy their verdure [fresh flourishing vegetation];<sup>22</sup> and yet, unlike evergreens in our country, they are all fruit-bearers."<sup>23</sup> Matthew Henry observes that the "[blessed man's] profession shall be preserved from blemish and decay: *his leaf also shall not wither*. As to those who bring forth only the leaves of profession, without any good fruit, even their leaf will wither, and they shall be as much ashamed of their profession as ever they were proud of it."<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> *The American College Dictionary*: Random House, New York, 1963, p. 1351.

<sup>23</sup> *The Treasury of David* by Charles Spurgeon, Vol.1, p. 8; Baker Book House edition, 1981

<sup>24</sup> *Matthew Henry's Commentary*; Matthew Henry, Fleming H. Revell Co., New York, Vol. III, p. 240.

## A Place of Prosperity

*"...and whatsoever he doeth shall prosper."*  
(Psalm 1:3c)

Unfortunately, too many people associate "prosperity" with financial or material gain when, in reality, nothing could be further from the truth. There are those who bask in the luxurious wealth of this world yet are spiritual paupers. And there are others who may be poor by this world's standards yet are truly rich with the things that matter—the things of eternal value.

To many people, prosperity means success! You are successful if you have a well-paying job, live in a nice house and drive a new car every couple of years. And so, the American College Dictionary defines it as "the gaining of wealth, position and the like."<sup>25</sup> That is how the world defines success. But what is success in a biblical world view

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<sup>25</sup> *The American College Dictionary*: Random House, New York, 1963, p. 1208.

context as opposed to that of a secular world view? Let me give you a simple, but practical, working definition of success from a spiritual perspective. Success is finding God's will for your life and faithfully doing it! Whatever it is. Wherever it is. Yes, even with whomever it is.

In his letter to Pastor Timothy, the apostle Paul acknowledged that, while there is a temporary benefit to physical exercise, the exercise of godliness is of far greater importance and value. He wrote, "*For bodily exercise profiteth little; but godliness is profitable unto all things, having promise of the life that now is, and of that which is to come*" (1 Timothy 4:8). He also told Timothy to "*Meditate upon these things; give thyself wholly to them; that thy profiting may appear to all*" (1 Timothy 4:15). The idea here is that the benefit that Timothy had from his own spiritual growth and study of the Word would be evident to those to whom he ministered.

Paul also expressed that the spiritual blessings far outweigh the material ones when he told the Ephesian church that [God] has “blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ” (Ephesians 1:3).

### **Joseph, a Prosperous Man?**

The life of the patriarch Joseph serves as a good example. Hated and envied by his evil brothers, he was twice sold, once by his brothers and once by the Ishmeelites. This young seventeen-year-old boy had become the property of another. In spite of that fact, Joseph is described in Genesis 39 as “*a prosperous man...in the house of his master the Egyptian.*” (Genesis 39:2) Joseph did not even own the clothes on his back, much less the bed in which he slept. And yet, the Bible describes him as prosperous! How so? Because he was *what* God wanted him to be at that moment; he was *where* God wanted him to be at that time; and he was *doing* what God wanted him to do at that time.

Genesis 39 closes with Joseph in prison after being falsely accused and charged. And once again the Bible says of him that *“the Lord was with him, and that which he did, the LORD made it to prosper.”* (Genesis 39:23) He was, indeed, successful in the eyes of God and was not a failure as the world might have looked at it.

Another example is the life of Uzziah. The Bible records of him, *“And he sought God in the days of Zechariah, who had understanding in the visions of God: and as long as he sought the LORD, God made him to prosper.”* (II Chronicles 26:16) Sadly, he did not continue to seek the Lord, for he became puffed up and proud of his accomplishments. The Bible says of him, *“But when he was strong, his heart was lifted up to his destruction...”* (II Chronicles 26:16).



## PART TWO:

### THE UNGODLY MAN

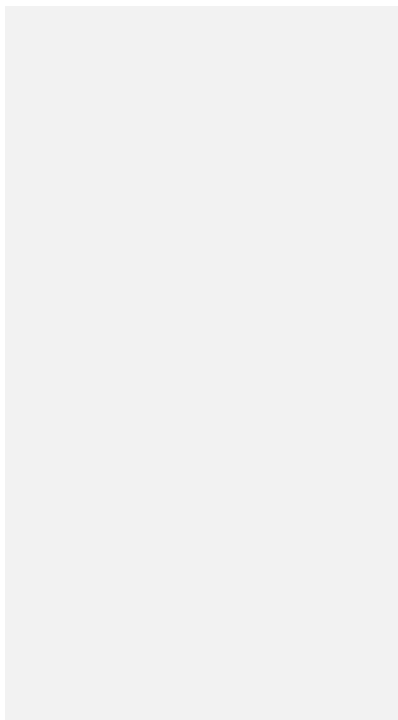
*“The ungodly are not so: but are like the chaff which the wind driveth away.*

*Therefore, the ungodly shall not stand in the judgment, nor sinners in the congregation of the righteous.*

*For the LORD knoweth the way of the righteous: but the way of the ungodly shall perish.”*

(Psalm 1:4–6)

In this section we will examine the *Scattering of the Sinner*; the *Separation of the Sinner*; the *Suffering of the Sinner*; and the *Security of the Saint*.



## Chapter Four

### The Scattering of the Sinner

*“The ungodly are not so: but are like the chaff which the wind driveth away.”* (Psalm 1:4)

Notice here the clear *contrast* between the godly man (“blessed”) and the ungodly man. A literal rendering here might look something like an emphatic “Not so, the ungodly! Not so!” In other words, the ungodly person is the antithesis, or the exact opposite, of the godly and blessed person. What is true in the life of the godly can *never* be true in the life of the ungodly. What a sad lot it is—the life of the ungodly.

Then notice the *comparison* to chaff. Unlike the godly man who is compared to a tree whose roots go deep down into the soil, the ungodly man is compared to wind-blown, worthless chaff.

Allow me to tell you about two trees. We will come back to the chaff in a moment.

### A Tale of Two Trees

*“As ye have therefore received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk ye in him: **Rooted** and built up in him and stablished in the faith, as ye have been taught, abounding therein with thanksgiving.”*  
(Colossians 2:6–7)

One of the fringe benefits of a traveling ministry is the educational value derived from the variety of things seen and experienced. God can teach us some beautiful spiritual lessons through His creation, such as the following.

This is a tale of two trees, the mighty Sequoia and the graceful Weeping Willow. It is said that the mighty Sequoia trees are the oldest living things on earth, with a life expectancy of up to three thousand years. Many of them, standing tall and majestic today in the forests of central California, were living during the time that Jesus walked and

ministered here on the earth more than two thousand years ago. These magnificent trees can reach heights that exceed 270 feet and circumferences that measure more than 100 feet. The General Sherman tree is the largest known tree in the world with a base diameter of 40.3 feet, a circumference of 107.6 feet and a height of 277 feet! This tree is three feet wider than my motorhome is long!

On one of our visits to Sequoia National Park several years ago, I was able to drive my one-ton, fifteen-passenger van right through a tunnel carved out of one of those mighty trees.

One of the most unusual things about the mighty Sequoia is its root system, which is very shallow, typically no deeper than three feet. Most of their root system (which can spread out as much as 100 feet or more) can be seen all over the surface near the tree, sometimes inches above the ground. One must be very careful walking through a Sequoia grove since the roots are large and it is easy to stumble.

It is also interesting to note that the roots of one Sequoia often link arms with those of another tree, making for mutual support. What a wonderful picture this can be of Christians supporting one another through prayer and fellowship. There are no diseases fatal to the Sequoia, nor are there any insects that can harm it. Even forest fires cannot destroy it. On the contrary, it is the very heat of the forest fire that causes the cones lying on the ground to break open, thus dispersing the seeds. Sequoia trees do not even die of old age! Amazingly, the only natural enemies the Sequoia has are wind, undermining of soil by water erosion, and... snow. However, none of the above enemies would be able to topple this giant, *if* it had a deeper root system to anchor it in the soil.

As the winter storms sweep across the Sierra Nevada mountains, they deposit thick layers of snow. The snow often piles up on only one side of the tree, making it top-heavy. Even the mighty Sequoia has a breaking point and will occasionally topple from the tremendous weight

of the snow. The problem is *not* the snow but the shallow root system. With no depth, there is neither the strength nor the stability needed to keep the tree properly balanced.

In contrast, consider the graceful Weeping Willow, rarely ever seen lying on the ground unless struck by lightning. Despite its gracefulness, the Weeping Willow can be quite destructive, as its roots go deep into the soil in search of moisture. If too close to a house, the roots can wrap around water and sewer pipes, causing much damage. But, out in the country, there is nothing lovelier than a row of these trees lining the bank of a stream slowly winding its way through the meadow in the heat of summer.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>26</sup>[*Encyclopedia of North American Trees*, Firefly Books, Buffalo, NY, 200, pp. 249-250; *Illustrated Encyclopedia of Trees*, Timber Press, Portland, OR 2002, p. 91.; *The Last Redwoods*, Sierra Club-Ballantine Books, San Francisco, CA, 1969, pp. 53, 65.; *A personal tour through Sequoia National Park*, CA]

What a contrast we find in these two trees. As we have seen, the mighty Sequoia may live longer than the Weeping Willow, but its shallow root system is often the cause of its cataclysmic death. Spiritually, the believer is exhorted in the above verses to become “Rooted and built up in Him [Christ].” We must be grounded doctrinally to withstand the storms of life. The winds of false doctrine will ever seek to topple the Child of God. The depth of the spiritual root will determine the strength and stability of the believer.

Now back to the *chaff*. Dr. Merrill Unger writes in his *Bible Dictionary*: “The refuse of winnowed grain, consisting of husks and broken straw... From its being the lighter and, comparatively speaking, worthless portion of the grain, *chaff* is used in Scripture as an emblem of that which is, in doctrine or morals, of a similar nature; of false



teachers (Jer. 23:28); evil doers, who must come to naught (Ps. 1:4; Isa. 33:11; Matt. 3:12)."<sup>27</sup>

Unger also describes the "winnowing" process whereby the grain was separated from the chaff. He writes "Threshing floors were placed in the open air, leveled and tramped down hard, generally on elevated ground, so that in winnowing the wind might carry away the chaff (Hos.13:3; Jer. 4:11).... The mass of chaff, straw, and grain was thrown against the wind so that the chaff might be blown away. This was usually done in the evening, when there was generally a breeze."<sup>28</sup> Thus the Psalmist describes the life of the ungodly, those who are without God.

It is also interesting to note that the chaff and the wheat grow together until the harvest time when it then is separated the one from the other. Here,

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<sup>27</sup> *Unger's Bible Dictionary*: Merrill Unger; Moody Press, Chicago; 1980, p. 186.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 29, 30.

again, is another demonstration of the Biblical doctrine of separation.

## Chapter Five

### The Separation of the Sinner

*"Therefore, the ungodly shall not stand in the judgment, nor sinners in the congregation of the righteous." (Psalm 1:5)*

#### The Ungodly Shall Not Stand

*"Therefore, the ungodly shall not stand in the judgment..." (Psalm 1:5a).*

The phrase "*shall not stand*" does not mean that these people will not have to stand trial, for indeed, they will. What is meant here is that the ungodly will not stand trial *successfully*, that is, they *will* be found guilty before the Judgment Bar of God!

The use of the words "*stand trial*" seems to be the basis for the common practice of British

jurisprudence (which was carried over to the colonies) where the accused stood in a small box surrounded by an iron railing for the duration of the trial. A visit to the historic Independence Hall in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania will show such a box in the colonial courtroom. The phrase *standing trial* is still used in modern jurisprudence, but the accused now sits at a table in the courtroom beside his attorney.

There are multitudes today who think that somehow, they can live however they like, do whatever they want with total freedom of choice without even thinking about the consequences of such a life. In fact, one of the reasons for believing in evolution is evolution's mistaken idea that there is no God, no Creator and, therefore, no accountability. But there *is* a God and there *is* accountability, for the Bible emphatically states *"That at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth; and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the*

*Father.*" (Philippians 2:10-11) The Bible states it again a slightly different way: "...every knee shall bow to me, and every tongue shall confess to God." (Romans 14:11) The ungodly may think that they have gotten away with things for a while, but there is a day of reckoning coming. Dear reader, *you* need to be prepared for that day as well. Do not think that you can escape the judgment of God. Every knee will one day bow. It is best to bow that knee and confess to Christ now, because if you wait until the proverbial "later," it may be too late.

In Revelation 20, God gives us a picture of the yet future Great White Throne that will take place in the righteous courtroom of the righteous Judge of the universe, God Himself.

*"And I saw a great white throne, and him [the Judge] that sat on it, from whose face the earth and the heaven fled away; and there was found no place for them. And I saw the dead, small and great, stand [the Judged] before God; and the **books** were opened: and another **book** was opened, which is the **book** of life: and the dead*

were judged out of those things which were written in the **books**, according to their works. And the sea gave up the dead which were in it; and death and hell delivered up the dead which were in them: and they were judged every man according to their works [the Justice].” (Revelation 20:11–13)

Of particular interest here are the two words *book* and *books*. One is singular and the other is plural. The singular *book* is identified as the *book of life* with the names of all of God’s redeemed. It is mentioned a third time in verse fifteen where we read, “And whosoever was not found written in the **book of life** was cast into the lake of fire.” This book signifies *where* eternity will be spent while the *books* (plural) signify *how* eternity will be spent. Notice with me in both verses 12b and 13b, it is according to their works. That is infinite, perfect justice!

In these *books* [plural], God has recorded every thought, word and deed that each person thought would somehow get them into heaven. But God, the righteous Judge of the universe will prove, in a legal court of law, that nothing people thought

would get them into heaven worked. Instead of helping people into heaven, their works condemn them in the end. How truly sad!

As there are degrees of reward in heaven, so there are degrees of punishment in the Lake of Fire (sometimes referred to as “eternal hellfire”). The Bible tells us, *“And that servant, which knew his lord’s will, and prepared not himself, neither did according to his will, shall be beaten with many stripes. But he that knew not, and did commit things worthy of stripes, shall be beaten with few stripes. For unto whomsoever much is given, of him shall be much required...”* (Luke 12:47–48).

We need to understand that the Lake of Fire is a terrible place of eternal judgment in a literal, non-consuming fire.<sup>29</sup> To those who have heard again and again and have refused time after time, it is as though the fires are heated that much more. By contrast, those who have never heard

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<sup>29</sup> See Moses and the burning bush. What got his attention was not merely that the bush was on fire, but that it was not being consumed (Exodus 3:2).

the gospel (even though God had revealed Himself in the things of creation (Romans 1:20), will suffer because of their rejection of the “light” they did have in creation, but it will not be like the suffering of those who have heard and rejected. My friend, Hell is no joke! It is to be taken seriously for it is an eternal state!

### **Sinners Shall Not Stay**

*“...nor sinners in the congregation of the righteous” (Psalm 1:5b).*

I wondered about this phrase for a long time. It does not mean that sinners will not be part of a local congregation here in this life on this earth, for there are many lost people who have their names registered in the membership of some church.

At the time of my conversion, I was an active, baptized church member, but lost. My own father made a profession of faith when he was in his early thirties but did not truly accept Christ



until the age of seventy-five (more than four decades later) while serving, not only as a church member, but also as the chairman of the deacons in a fundamental, Bible-preaching church! What this verse means is that lost people, while they may be part of a hometown church, will *not* be a part of the heavenly church.

Matthew Henry describes the idea of sinners not being a part of the future congregation in heaven with these words: "The wicked and profane, in this world, ridiculed the righteous and their congregation, despised them and cared not for their company; justly therefore will they be forever separated from them. Hypocrites in this world, under the disguise of a plausible profession, may thrust themselves into the congregation of the righteous and remain undisturbed and undiscovered there; but Christ cannot be imposed upon, though his ministers may; the day is coming when he will separate *between the sheep and the goats, the tares and the wheat*. [emphasis in original] That great day

will be a day of discovery, a day of distinction, and a day of final division.”<sup>30</sup>

### Character and Choices

Here is something interesting. The word *ungodly* has to do with *character* or *being* (what we are). Strong’s Concordance defines it to be morally wrong.”<sup>31</sup> The word for *sinners* denoted *choices* or *doing*; not just what we are but what we do, the choices we make. Strong’s defines sinners as accounted guilty.”<sup>32</sup>

We hear a lot about “pro-choice” today, but what we don’t hear about are the consequences that result from those choices. Like it or not, *every* choice has a consequence. If you sow your wild oats when you are young, you cannot expect a good crop when you are older. What you sow and how you sow determine the kind of crop reaped

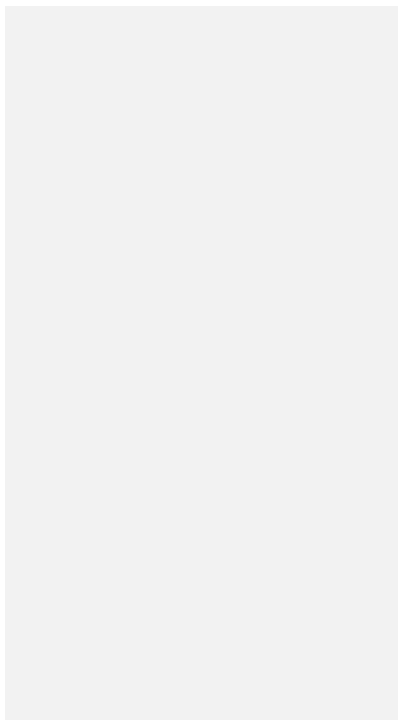
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<sup>30</sup> *Matthew Henry’s Commentary*: Vol. III, p. 241.

<sup>31</sup> Strong’s H7563.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.* H2400

years later. If you are in your youth, you are in the sowing stage of your life. If you want a good crop later, sow good seed today. If you are older, you may already be in the reaping stage of life. Those years of reaping can be a real blessing or a real heartache, as some of you, no doubt, know already.



## Chapter Six

### The Suffering of the Sinner

*“But the way of the ungodly shall perish.”*  
(Psalm 1:6b)

#### The Ungodly Himself

In his night-time conversation with Nicodemus, the Lord Jesus spoke about the perishing of the ungodly when He said, twice: “That whosoever believeth in him should not **perish**, but have eternal life... For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not **perish**, but have everlasting life.” (John 3:15–16) The clear implication here is that there are those who *are* presently perishing and who *will*, in the future, perish eternally unless they turn to Jesus Christ as personal Saviour.

The Apostle Paul used the same expression when writing to the church at Rome: "For as many as have sinned without law shall also **perish** without law: and as many as have sinned in the law shall be judged by the law." (Romans 2:12) In the context, those who "*have sinned without law*" is a reference to the Gentile, while those who "*have sinned in the law*" refers to the Jew. Whether Jew or Gentile makes no difference: without Christ *all* will ultimately perish.

"The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness; but is longsuffering to us-ward, not willing that any should **perish**, but that all should come to repentance." (II Peter 3:9) The encouraging part here is that it is not God's desire that *any* should perish, that is, to die in their sins and be eternally condemned in the Lake of Fire.

## The Work of the Ungodly

Solomon wrote that *“God shall bring every **work** into judgment, with every secret thing, whether it be good or evil.”* (Ecclesiastes 12:14) Ungodly men (and women) may engage in their wicked deeds for a while, but there is coming a time when it will all come to an end. Mankind may mock and defy God now, but there is a day of reckoning ahead when every knee will bow before Him and every tongue will confess that He is God. There is a day of judgment coming when all wrongs will be made right and every evil deed, thought, and word (mankind’s works) will be accounted for. For the unconverted sinner, that day will be the most terrible day of his life! The fact that that day is still future (as of this writing) means that there is still time for you to repent and to turn from your sins to God and be saved through faith in Jesus Christ. Peter writes, *“And account that the longsuffering of our Lord [Jesus Christ] is salvation.”* (II Peter 3:15a)

## The Way of the Ungodly

In Matthew 7, the Lord Jesus said, *“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.”* (Matthew 7:13–14)

The “Broad” way may be wide; it may even be beautifully “landscaped” and very appealing; and it is surely very popular. But it is a deadly way that leads to eternal destruction. Proverbs 14:12 tells us that *“there is a way that seemeth right unto a man, but the end thereof are the ways of death.”* This exact statement is repeated in Proverbs 16:25, giving it even more weight.

You may say, as many have, that “the majority can’t all be wrong.” Oh, yes, they can! Both the words of Solomon and the Lord Jesus Christ Himself make it very clear that, in the end, the majority of the world *will* be wrong—and for

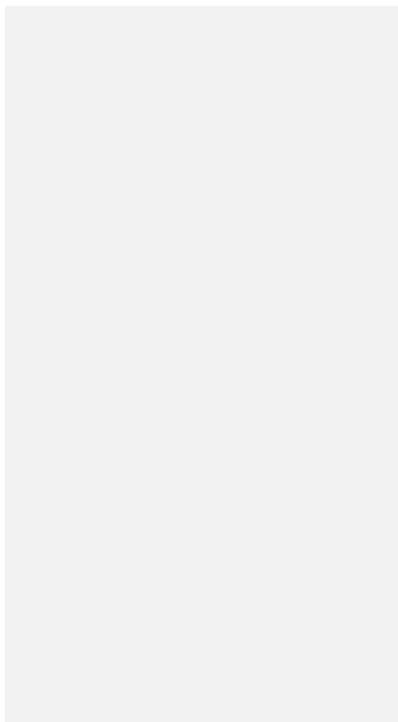


eternity! Better settle the question of salvation right now before it is too late!

The point to be made here is simply this: the world will not always live like it does presently. For not only will the wicked themselves perish, so will their works and their way! That “way” that appeals to so many and deceives so many will one day, itself, perish so that no one else may follow its pernicious ways. The very “way” itself will be destroyed and perish from the earth. As Matthew Henry put it, “that their way, though pleasant now, will perish at last.”<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> Matthew Henry's Commentary: Vol. III, p. 241.



## Chapter Seven

# The Security of the Saint

*“For the LORD knoweth the way of the righteous...”* (Psalm 1:6a)

### **“The LORD”**

These are very precious words to those who have been saved by His grace (Ephesians 2:8–9). First, you will notice that the word “LORD” is in all caps. That means it refers to *Jehovah*; the *Almighty*; the *self-existent One* Who has been from “eternity” past.

### **“Knoweth”**

The next key word is *knoweth*. Please note that it is in the present tense. Not only does He know right now, He *constantly* knows. In other words, there is never a time when God doesn’t know all

about you and me; where we are, what we're doing—even the very thoughts dancing across the backstage of our minds. He knows, always has known, and always will know every need that you and I have, and furthermore, has promised to meet those needs according to His riches in glory! Do you not find this thought comforting, encouraging, exciting and uplifting? Understanding this marvelous truth, how it is possible for any Christian to live his or her life down in the spiritual dumps is beyond me.

### **“The Way”**

There is a third expression to be considered here, and that is the phrase *the way*. He knows the way that you and I are on eternally; either the Broad way leading to destruction or the Narrow way, unpopular and perhaps unappealing at first, that leads to Life everlasting in a place with the Lord! However, God not only knows my way eternally, but also temporally; that is, in the present. Job,

amid much suffering and severe trials said, *“He knoweth the way that I take: when he hath tried me, I shall come forth as gold.”* (Job 23:10)

The Psalmist wrote, *“The steps of a good man are ordered by the LORD: and he [the good or righteous man] delighteth in his way.”* (Psalm 37:23) The way specifically referred to here is the path of life that God has marked out for the good man to follow. A more modern expression might refer to “the will of God for one’s life.”

Though the *good man* delights in the path God ordained for him, that does not mean that there will not be trials, difficulties, or persecution. In the very next verse David continues, ***“Though he fall, he shall not be utterly cast down: [Why?] for the LORD [Jehovah] upholdeth him with his hand.”*** (Psalm 37:24)

The Apostle Paul suffered greatly for the cause of Christ, often being beaten and once left for dead. Yet he said, *“We are troubled on every side, yet*

not distressed; we are perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; cast down, but not destroyed." (II Corinthians 4:8–9)

### **"The Righteous"**

The word *righteous* simply means those who "are right with God," possible only through the blood of Jesus Christ. Paul writes with reference to those who are saved, "*But now in Christ Jesus ye who sometimes [lit. at one time] were far off are made nigh by the blood of Christ.*" (Ephesians 2:13)

In a letter to the church in Corinth, Paul wrote, "*For he [the Father] hath made him [the Son] to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him.*" (II Corinthians 5:21)

The Bible is very clear that, as we are born into this world, "*There is none righteous, no, not one.*" (Romans 3:10) While no one is *righteous* (or right with God; i.e. salvation) at birth, it is equally clear

that a person *can be made righteous* [or right with God] through the person and work of Jesus Christ. *“For as by one man’s [Adam’s] disobedience many were made sinners, so by the obedience of one [Jesus Christ] shall many be made righteous.”* (Romans 5:19)

### Conclusion

Psalm One divides into two parts, almost like two families. The Bible does speak of two spiritual families. Jesus spoke of those who *“were of [their] father the Devil.”* Jesus also spoke of the need of having a new birth, a spiritual one. To Nicodemus He said, *“Marvel not that I said unto thee, ‘Ye must be born again.’”* (John 3:7) Then, in writing to the Galatian church, the Apostle Paul said, *“For ye are all the children of God by faith in Jesus Christ.”* (Galatians 3:26)

It is extremely important to note that the use of the word *all* being children of God is qualified by

the concluding phrase in that verse: *“by faith in Jesus Christ.”* Not faith in the church, your own good works, baptism, the sacraments, or anything else. It is not faith in *something* that saves but faith in *Someone*, and that is Jesus Christ.

The Bible also makes it clear that you have a choice to make. Jesus told the religious leaders of His day, *“Ye **will not** come to me that ye might have life.”* (John 5:40) Salvation, on the human side, is essentially a part of your will.

John 1:12 could not be more clear when it says, *“But as many as received Him, to them gave He power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on His name.”* There is a lot in this verse, so let me repeat it with a few qualifications to help you better understand. *“But as many [whosoever, includes you] as received [to seize or to take as your very own] Him [Jesus Christ, not the church or anything else], to them [to them only] gave He power [or authority] to become the sons [or children] of God, even to*



*them that believe* [not a mere intellectual or head knowledge, but a belief that acts upon that which is known to be true] *on His name.*" The Bible addresses the importance of the name of Christ for salvation this way: "*neither is there salvation in any other: for there is **none other name** under heaven given among men, **whereby we must be saved.***" (Acts 4:12)

To those who will receive Jesus Christ as personal Saviour, the blessings of the first three verses of Psalm 1 can become a reality. But for those who reject Jesus Christ as personal Saviour, and I truly trust that you are not one of them, both their present and future life are described in the last half of this Psalm as the life of the ungodly.

As Pilate of old asked, "*What then shall I do with Jesus?*" (Matthew 27:22) So you, too, must ask yourself, "*What will **I** do with Jesus?*" In answering that question, may I remind you that there are only two choices. You may receive Him by faith and be born again and have the gift of

eternal life OR you may refuse Him and continue as you are. To die **in** Christ is to be **with** Him, forever. But to die **without** Christ, is to be **without** Him...forever!

The choice is yours. You can be the blessed person of the first half of the psalm, or you can be the unblessed, ungodly person spoken of in the second half of the psalm. It all depends on what choice you make. I ask you now, "What will **you** do with Jesus?"

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