



Coptic Orthodox Diocese of the Southern United States



The Holy Book of Psalms

Psalm 1

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Introduction

- If there's one thing everyone wants, it is to be happy
- But if everyone seeks happiness, then why cannot everyone find it?
- Could they be pursuing it in the wrong direction?
- In Psalm 1, God says that all the ways by which people pursue happiness boil down to two basic ways; good and evil
- This psalm is a psalm of instruction concerning good and evil, setting before us life and death, the blessing and the curse, that we may take the right way which leads to happiness and avoid that which will certainly end in our misery and ruin

Introduction



- The author of this psalm is not known, but some have suggested that Solomon is the author and has written Psalm one as a suitable introduction to the whole Psalter
- Others say it was David
- Being at the beginning of the Psalms seems to give clear guidance regarding the way in which believers should conduct their lives
- This Psalm is a presentation of how Jesus lived His life in this world, contrasting His God-directed life with the life of the ungodly
- It is classified as a wisdom psalm



Introduction

- It contrasts dramatically the "two ways," the two fundamental options for human being
- It offers a main theological principle, man's free will
- Man has the choice to embrace the godly way or the ungodly
- Whoever collected the psalms of David (some believe it was Ezra) with good reason put this psalm first, as an introduction to the rest, because it is absolutely necessary to the acceptance of our prayers that we be righteous before God (for it is only the prayer of the upright that is His delight)
- And therefore that we be right in our thinking of blessedness and in our choice of the way that leads to it



Introduction

- Those are not fit to put up good prayers who do not walk in good ways
- Some contemplated on this psalm saying that it begins with "aleph," the first letter of the Hebrew alphabet, "Ashre" (blessed)
- And its final word "tobet," starts with the last letter of the alphabet, "taw"
- Psalm 1 thereby seems to include the meaning of the entire Psalter, as well as the whole Bible



Introduction

Psalm Outline:

- The Contrast of Two Ways 1:1-2
- The Way of the Godly 1:3
- The Way of the Wicked 1:4-5
- The Concluding Judgment on the Two Ways 1:6

The Contrast of Two Ways 1:1-2



- Blessed - This Book of Psalms opens with a benediction, just as did the Sermon of our Lord upon the Mount
- The Hebrew words are very definite and specific: Blessedness belongs to that man
- Blessedness here means happiness
- And the character of the truly happy man is described in this Psalm both negatively, in his abstaining from sin
- And positively, adheres to God's word obeying His commandments



The Contrast of Two Ways 1:1-2

- The blessed man does *not* do certain things
- There is a way he will *not walk*, a path he will *not stand in*, and a seat he will *not sit in*
- The psalmist marks the progression of the ungodly person: walking, standing and sitting with the unrighteous
- Some have interpreted *Who walks not in the counsel of the ungodly* to mean "thinking evil"
- As for *Nor stands in the path of sinners* this indicates intending to enter and to work with them
- Finally *Nor sits in the seat of the scornful* has been interpreted as "responding eagerly to the deceits and teachings of the wicked"



The Contrast of Two Ways 1:1-2

- Sin is progressive
- The progression to wickedness consists of three stages: thinking, doing, and teaching
- Walking *in the counsel of the ungodly* means adoption of the principles of the evil-doers as a rule of life, by letting oneself be guided by their advice
- A godly person avoids the evil by completely rejecting the companionship of the wicked, so that he will not be led by them
- Those who keep the commandments of their God must say to evil-doers, *Depart from us* (Psalm 119:115), and departing from evil is that in which wisdom begins



The Contrast of Two Ways 1:1-2

- The righteous man and the ungodly man are different in how they *think*, how they *behave*, and to whom they *belong*
- With all the advice that comes to us, from so many different sources, the righteous man knows how to stay away from the *counsel of the ungodly*
- The righteous man knows how to discern the *counsel of the ungodly*
- The righteous man is also discerning enough to know the *counsel of the ungodly* can come from one's own self
- Our own conscience, our own mind, our own heart, can give us ungodly counsel



The Contrast of Two Ways 1:1-2

- The righteous man knows where to find completely godly counsel: *Your testimonies also are my delight and my counselors* (Psalm 119:24)
- Sinners have a *path* where they stand, and the righteous man knows he does not belong on that path
- *Path* speaks of a way, a road, a direction – and the righteous man is not traveling in the same direction as sinners
- The righteous man knows which *path* to take, *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* (Matthew 7:13)



The Contrast of Two Ways 1:1-2

- The worst sin is that of taking a seat in the meeting of the *scornful*, associating with them
- *Of the scornful*, of those who reject, despise, and scorn all remedies; who make a mock of sin, and of God's warning and judgments against sinners
- Observe, *the ungodly* - one who is not guided by God; the sinner - he who adds to ungodliness sin; and the scornful - the one who does not believe in God and make a mock of every holy thing
- The Ungodly man walks, the Sinner stands, and the Scornful man sits down in the way of iniquity

The Contrast of Two Ways 1:1-2



- See by what steps men arrive at the height of wickedness
- They are *ungodly* first, casting off the fear of God and living in the neglect of their duty to Him
- But they do not rest there
- When the services of religion are laid aside, they come to be *sinners*, that is, they break out into open rebellion against God and engage in the service of sin and Satan
- Then the heart is so hardened after living in sin for so long, they come to be *scorners*, that is, they openly resist all that is sacred

The Contrast of Two Ways 1:1-2



- Some fathers, as well as St. Augustine, believe that the one blessed here is Jesus Christ, the second Adam, who carries the Church as the holy body of the Holy Head, granting her a blessed life
- It is worthy to note that the psalmist blesses those who oppose evil and resist it
- This confirms that blessedness is granted to those who resist sin
- St. Augustine stresses that a youth who resists sin and evil thoughts and does not do so out of childishness, in fact attains a greater reward than a child who keeps pure due to his age



The Contrast of Two Ways 1:1-2

- St. Augustine *says*, “This is to be understood of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord Man
- “*Blessed is the man that hath not gone away in the counsel of the ungodly,*” as “the man of earth did,” who consented to his wife deceived by the serpent, to the transgressing the commandment of God
- “*Nor stood in the way of sinners.*” For He came indeed in the way of sinners, by being born as sinners are; but He “stood” not therein, for that the enticements of the world held Him not
- “*And hath not sat in the seat of pestilence.*” He willed not an earthly kingdom, with pride, which is well taken for “the seat of pestilence;” for that there is hardly anyone who is free from the love of rule and craves not human glory.

The Contrast of Two Ways 1:1-2



- The righteous man finds *his delight in the law of the LORD*
- The positive side of a good man's character is now described
- If a person delights in something, he will do it all by himself
- You can measure your *delight* for the word of God by how much you hunger for it
- Since Jesus Christ - the Word of God Incarnate - is the Way, then we have to be bible-centered; God's Law that leads man in the right way
- This is what keeps us out of the way of the ungodly and secures and strengthens us against their temptations



The Contrast of Two Ways 1:1-2

- The law of God may be here understood of the whole doctrine delivered by God to the church, consisting of doctrines, principles, promises, and warnings
- He delights in it, though it is a law, a yoke, because it is the law of God, which is holy, just, and good, which the righteous freely consents to, and so delights in, *after the inward man*, (Romans 7:16,22), *“If, then, I do what I will not to do, I agree with the law that it is good ... For I delight in the law of God according to the inward man.”*
- *meditates*, Implies a deep, and serious, and affectionate thoughtfulness about it

The Contrast of Two Ways 1:1-2



- We must not only meditate on God's word *day and night*, but these thoughts should be interwoven with whatever we do
- According to St. Jerome, "Meditation on the Law does not simply consist of reading, but of doing. Just as the apostle says in another place, *"Whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God."* (1 Corinthians 10:31)
- St. John Chrysostom says, "Let us consider all things secondary to hearing the word of God and to think no season unseasonable ...; let every season belong to it."

The Contrast of Two Ways 1:1-2



- In eastern non-Christian meditation, the goal is to *empty* the mind
- This is dangerous, because an empty mind may present an open invitation to the deception of Satan
- But in Christian meditation, the goal is to *fill* your mind with the word of God
- This can be done by carefully thinking about each word and phrase, applying it to one's self, and praying it back to the Lord



The Way of the Godly 1:3

- A tree by a river has a continual source of water
- It will never wither away, because it is always getting what it needs
- The life of the righteous man is marked by strength and stability just like a tree that is strong and stable, sinking down deep roots
- St. Augustine comments on the word *water* by saying that it could mean “*the river of God is full of water.*” (Psalm 65:9)
- Or, the Holy Spirit, “*He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit;*” (Luke 3:16)



The Way of the Godly 1:3

- Or Christ, *“If anyone thirsts, let him come to Me, and drink;”* (John 7:37) and again, *“If you knew the gift of God, and who it is who says to you, ‘Give Me a drink,’ you would have asked Him, and He would have given you living water.”*
- He says also, *“by the rivers of water,* may mean the sins of the people, because first the waters are called “peoples” in the Apocalypse”
- As a result of meditating on the Law of the Lord, we bring forth fruit (John 15:8), and our fruit will be lasting (John 15:16)
- But we can't be fruitful or prosperous without the waters of the Holy Spirit, who grants us the power to endure the hardships of life



The Way of the Godly 1:3

- The righteous man bears fruit, such as the fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22-23)
- The fruit comes naturally from this tree, because it is *planted by the rivers of water*
- It is abiding in a life-source
- As Jesus spoke of bearing fruit in John 15:5, as we abide in Him
- Fruit also has a *season*
- Some get discouraged when they begin to walk as righteous men, and fruit is not immediately evident
- They need to wait until they bring forth *fruit in its season*



The Way of the Godly 1:3

- *Wither*, Brown, dead, withered leaves are signs of death and dryness
- The righteous man does not have these signs of death and dryness; his “leaves” are green and alive
- He is ingrafted in Christ the true vine, and abide in Him, from whom he has his strength, nourishment, and fruit, John 15:1
- He is rooted and built up in Him, and established in the faith of Him; and so he holds fast to his faith without wavering
- *whatever he does shall prosper*, In the life of the righteous man, God brings forth something good and wonderful out of everything



The Way of the Godly 1:3

- Even tough circumstances bring forth something that *shall prosper*
- Not so much in things temporal for in these the good man does not always succeed, but in things spiritual
- Whatever he does in faith, from love, to the glory of God, and in the name of Christ, prospers
- St. Augustine says that:
the tree is our Lord Jesus Christ; *the rivers of water* is the Holy Spirit; *brings forth its fruit* will establish Churches; *in His season*, after He has been glorified by His Resurrection and Ascension into heaven; *leaf also shall not wither* His Word shall not be in vain



The Way of the Wicked 1:4-5

- Everything true about the righteous man – stable as a tree, continual life and nourishment, fruitful, alive, and prosperous – is *not so* regarding the *ungodly*
- *Chaff* is the light shell around a kernel of grain, which must be stripped away before the kernel of grain can be ground into flour
- *Chaff* was light enough that it could be separated from the grain by throwing a portion into the wind and letting the wind drive it away
- This is how unstable, how lacking in substance, the ungodly are



The Way of the Wicked 1:4-5

- The scattering of chaff by the wind is a common figure in the O.T. for the sudden destruction of the wicked, Psalm 35:5; Job 21:18; Isaiah 29:5; Hosea 13:3
- Here it describes their character as well as their fate
- They are vain and superficial, unprofitable and hurtful, without any root of true and solid goodness, *“tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine.”* Ephesians 4:14 and with every wind of their own lusts or temptations
- *Therefore the ungodly shall not stand*, Notice contrast with Psalm 1:1



The Way of the Wicked 1:4-5

- Those who had deliberately chosen the assembly of the scornful will have no place in that of the good
- Their real character will be manifested in the judgement
- Because the *ungodly* have no “weight,” they will be found lacking on the day of judgment
- As it was said of King Belshazzar in the book of Daniel, “*You have been weighed in the balances, and found wanting*” (Daniel 5:27)
- *Nor sinners in the congregation of the righteous*, This is true in the future, because *sinners* will not share the same glorious future of the *righteous*

The Way of the Wicked 1:4-5



- It is also true in the present, because *sinners* since they do not belong *in the congregation of the righteous* if they insist on remaining *sinners*
- Here we must distinguish between the wicked who insist on living in sin and the sinner who is struggling against sin, trusting in the Savior
- St. Augustine says, “Every wicked man is a sinner, but not every sinner is a wicked man.”

The Concluding Judgment on the Two Ways 1:6



- The righteous people can have peace because a loving God in heaven knows their way and will protect and preserve them
- They are blessed because *the Lord knows their way*
- The way of the ungodly leads to destruction
- They must bear all the blame of their own destruction
- They are on a broad path that may seem comfortable now, but in the end they *shall perish* at the presence of the Lord
- God's curse shall be on all that they have, do, and are

The Concluding Judgment on the Two Ways 1:6



- And in the day of judgment they shall be condemned to everlasting fire
- Psalm one is included in the Morning Prayer and we begin with it every day while we are commemorating the resurrection of Christ
- Thus, before we start our day we ask our Risen Lord to grant us blessed day and life
- And to also stir up ourselves to prepare for the judgment day, and with a holy care to approve ourselves to God in everything, beseeching His mercy with our whole hearts



Discussion

- How does this Psalm work as an introduction to the entire book of Psalms?
- Why is it important to understand what the word “Blessed” really means? Why is it important that we understand it doesn’t always mean good circumstances?
- What are some ways that we are often tempted to “Walk in the counsel of the wicked”? What are the various options available to us?



Discussion

- Do you think it is possible to avoid *stands in the path of sinners*, and sitting *in the seat of the scornful*? Read Matthew 5:14-16 and I Peter 2:11-12...How do these passages relate to this question?
- What should motivate us to meditate on the word of God?
- By contrast what does the blessed man do?



Discussion

- What illustration does the Psalmist use to describe the blessed man?
- What are the attributes that the Psalmist ascribes to the tree? Where is it planted? What does it yield? What is unique about its leaves?
- Is it really true that the blessed man prospers in all that he does? Is the Psalmist talking about prospering in the here and now or in eternity?

Discussion



- What is the conclusion of Psalm 1? What contrast does the Psalmist point out between the righteous and the wicked?
- Unlike most of the Psalms, Psalm 1 is not itself a prayer. It is a meditation on meditation. Why do you think it was chosen to introduce the prayers of the Psalms?
- List any ways that Jesus Christ sheds light on Psalm 1, and ways Psalm 1 sheds light on the person and work of Jesus Christ.