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The Two Walks of Life (Psalm 1)

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Introduction

Psalms is the hymnbook of Israel. The majority of the psalms are independent compositions that can be understood independent of other psalms. The two emphases that characterize the psalms are the practical message and the prophetic message. The foundation for the practical message is the character of God in the midst of the crucible of the human experience. The prominent theme of the prophetic message is the anticipation of the Messiah, and the future blessings for all humanity as benefits of trust in the Messiah.

The compilation of the Psalms was achieved through a lengthy era of development, extending from the life of David to the life of Ezra (1000-440 BC). The historical division of the Psalms is fivefold (and may reflect the historical development of the Psalter): Book I (1-41), Book II (42-72), Book III (73-89), Book IV (90-106), and Book V (107-150). Each division is concluded with a doxology. The historical authors include: Moses, David, Asaph, Korah's descendants, Solomon, Heman the Ezrahite, and Ethan the Ezrahite.

Psalms is designated as a poetic book because it reflects the main characteristic of Hebrew poetry, which is parallelism of thought (as opposed to parallelism of sound). Poetic climax is employed by arranging specific statements for the purpose of directing the reader to a logical climax through the development of a progressive intensity. God chose this form which balances one thought or phrase by a corresponding thought or phrase which generally comprise the same number of words, or (as a minimum) a correlation of ideas. Parallelism not only makes poetical books easy to memorize but also helps in translation and interpretation. Explanatory notes begin many of the Psalms, and should be regarded as inspired text. The notes include musical instructions and provide information with regard to historical circumstances or reasons for the usage of a psalm. The psalms may be classified as creational, devotional, imprecatory, messianic, or penitential.

PSALM 1

Psalm 1 is a devotional psalm that contrasts two individuals: the righteous and the unrighteous. The exclusive portrayal of these two walks of life—the godly life and the ungodly life—is evident throughout the Psalter. Psalm 1 may be visualized according to these contrasts.

THE RIGHTEOUS 1:1-3	THE UNRIGHTEOUS 1:4-6
DESCRIPTION	ILLUSTRATION “LIKE CHAFF”
ILLUSTRATION “LIKE A TREE”	EXPLANATION

THE LIFE OF THE RIGHTEOUS

The godly life is described both negatively and positively in the initial two verses of Psalm 1. The negative description is threefold, and reflects an evident progression. The antithetic parallelism (i.e. the second line contrasts the first line) indicates that the negative warnings unheeded will culminate in neglect of the Word of God, and ultimately to perishing in judgment.

THE RIGHTEOUS		
Does not walk	in the counsel	of the wicked
Nor stand	in the path	of sinners
Nor sit	in the seat	of scoffers

The positive description of the righteous life is likewise threefold. The righteous life is described as regulated by the Word of God. The attitude of the righteous individual is one of continual delight and constant meditation upon biblical truth. The enduring blessing of God is extended to those who pursue righteousness, and therefore is not a transient feeling

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but the result of participation in the divine life. The relationship of the righteous individual to the Word of God is not superficial. The righteous are not only redeemed according to God's provision through the living Word, but also study the written Word to demonstrate themselves as approved servants of God. The priority of the righteous upon Scripture is because it reveals eternal truths, and therefore results in continual delight and constant meditation.

THE ENDURING BLESSING OF GOD IS EXTENDED TO THOSE WHO PURSUE RIGHTEOUSNESS, AND THEREFORE IS NOT A TRANSIENT FEELING BUT THE RESULT OF PARTICIPATION IN THE DIVINE LIFE.

“How blessed is the man who does not walk in the counsel of the wicked.” One who walks the path of righteousness is blessed (Heb. *’esher*, “happy”) if his or her “walk” (cf. the Hebrew verb *’ashûr*, translated “steps”) is not detained alongside those of the wicked. The verb *hāgāh* translated “meditates” and its derivatives with the noun *lēb* (“heart”) often denotes the seat of “thinking” and is therefore the functional equivalent for the activity of the mind (the verb *hāgāh* always refers to the activity of the organ of thought). Moreover, the walk of the righteous is “like a tree” planted firmly by its source of water. There are three characteristics of the walk of the righteous that form a simile.

PERMANENCE

In contrast to chaff, which is easily blown and moved, a tree is permanent. Unlikely to be moved by adverse winds, a tree stands firm and stationary.

PRODUCTIVITY

The tree is productive in yielding fruit by season. Trees produce their fruit regularly not haphazardly. The righteous individual is therefore characterized by consistency in his or her manner of living.

PROSPERITY

The success of those who walk a righteous life is attributed to the fact that he or she lives in accordance with the purpose and will of God.

THE LIFE OF THE UNRIGHTEOUS

There exists a vast chasm between the life of the righteous and the unrighteous. The psalmist declared, “the wicked are not so,” in contrast to the life of the righteous. The ungodly individual is likened to chaff. Chaff is insignificant, lifeless, transitory, and valueless. The life of the unrighteous is futile, shallow, unsubstantial, and worthless. The illustration of the life of the unrighteous is explained in verses 5-6 of Psalm 1.

THE WORKS OF THOSE WHO LIVE UNGODLY WILL EXPOSE THEM FOR WHO THEY ARE (REV 20:11-15). THE UNRIGHTEOUS WILL BE EXCLUDED FROM “THE ASSEMBLY OF THE RIGHTEOUS” (ACTS 17:31; REV 21:8; 22:15).

The psalmist states that the unrighteous “will not stand in the judgment.” The unrighteous have no means of defense. The works of those who live ungodly will expose them for who they are (Rev 20:11-15). The unrighteous will be excluded from “the assembly of the righteous” (Acts 17:31; Rev 21:8; 22:15). The destiny of the unrighteous is entirely different from the righteous.

In contrast to the chaff, the imagery of the righteous “like a tree” is a picture of life and stability. The unrighteous “will perish” but the godly will be preserved “for the Lord knows the way of the righteous.” God knows the life of the righteous in a personal and intimate manner. The Lord “knows” (Heb. *yâda’*, “watches over”) the righteous, as those who nourish themselves spiritually on the Word of God. The righteous are blessed because God graces, guides, and protects them. The life of the righteous is separate from the deceptions and defilements of those who do not internalize the Word of God.

THE RIGHTEOUS ARE BLESSED BECAUSE GOD GRACES, GUIDES, AND PROTECTS THEM.

Every person must ask the soul-searching question, What life am I living? One walk leads to blessedness and permanence, and the other to ruin. The Word of God requires one to determine the manner of his or her life accurately and carefully. The genuineness of the life of the righteous is proved by his or her spiritual character and actions.