

*Delight in the  
Law of the Lord  
Psalm 1*

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Every Christian should delight in God's Law. Do we delight in God's sacred writings? Do we meditate upon God's Law day and night? Do we ever read the Old Testament? Do we ever study the psalms? How often do we glance over the Pentateuch (the first five books of the Old Testament) or look at the prophets or even scan the poetic books? Is the Bible that Jesus cited an antiquated book? How did Jesus and the Apostles look upon the writings of Moses and the Prophets?

Before we embark upon an examination of Psalm 1, a brief overview of Paul's and Jesus' reaction toward the "Law of Moses, the Prophets and the Psalms" should shed light upon how important these writings are in the daily lives of God's people. These sixty-six books should set the tone for a much more meaningful study of this great chapter in the psalms. Just a casual reading of the New Testament writings reveals the importance of the psalms in the life of the early church, especially the authors of the New Testament books. During the time of the Protestant Reformation movement, the church fathers relied heavily upon the psalms for comfort during their struggles to promote the Atonement of Christ as the means of justification, not works.

## **PAUL'S ATTITUDE TOWARD THE OLD TESTAMENT WRITINGS**

### **Instructions to Timothy**

What was Paul's attitude toward the Old Testament? Just a perusal of Paul's instructions to Timothy concerning his early training should convince anyone of the importance of the Old Testament in the life of Paul. He calls forth the testimony of two women in Timothy's life who influenced and taught him the Old Testament from childhood: Timothy's grandmother (Lois) and mother (Eunice) [see 2 Timothy 1:5]. What is really significant about this mentioning of his relatives is highlighted toward the end of this short epistle in Paul's charge to Timothy (3:10-

17). Paul cogently expresses his attitude toward the relevancy of the thirty-nine books to Timothy in his final exhortation to this coworker:

But as for you, **continue in what you have learned** and have become convinced of, because you know those from whom you learned it,<sup>15</sup> and how from infancy you have known the **holy Scriptures**, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus.<sup>16</sup> **All Scripture is God-breathed** and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness,<sup>17</sup> so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work. (2 Timothy 3:14-17)

The context indicates that Paul is calling attention to what we today call the Old Testament. Again, this is significant since this letter was written to Timothy during Paul's final imprisonment (AD 66-67) under Emperor Nero (reigned: AD 54-68). Paul now languished in a cold dungeon (4:13) and in chains (1:16; 2:9). Paul was very much concerned about the persecution perpetrated upon the church and wanted to encourage Timothy to guard the Gospel (1:14) and to persevere in what his grandmother and mother had taught him from the Old Testament (3:14). Reflection upon the Old Testament writings should encourage him to continue to preach the Good News of salvation as foretold by Moses and the prophets (4:2).

Since Paul was an inspired man, we must take his advice seriously. For Paul the Scriptures are a powerful means of reformation (change for the better). Paul sets forth a number of benefits derived from the study of the Old Testament writings.<sup>1</sup> For instance, he says that the Scriptures are "able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus" (3:15). But Paul does not stop with that benefit. He enumerates four additional reasons for studying the Old Testament. Even though this catalog of benefits may come as a surprise to many of us, nevertheless, we should weigh carefully the following details: "useful for **teaching, rebuking, correcting** and **training** in righteousness" (3:16).

Again, in this same vein, we cannot help but mull over the words of Luke in his characterization of the Bereans in their use of the Old Testament writings: "Now the Bereans were of more noble character than the Thessalonians, for they received the message with great eagerness and examined the Scriptures every day to see if what Paul said was true" (Acts 17:11). This statement by Luke concerning the conduct of the Bereans corroborates what Paul instructed Timothy to abide in (2 Timothy 3:14). How many of us search the Old Testament today to understand the New Testament writings more clearly?

### **Comments about the Law to the Romans**

Not only did Paul inform Timothy about the relevancy of the Old Testament, but he also speaks of the abiding validity of the Law to the Romans. Paul writes Romans probably in the early spring of AD 57. This letter was written about twenty-four years after the Resurrection of Christ. Thus, his comments in this Epistle are quite revealing for the believer in seeking to understand the meaning of the Old Testament for the church. Following his discussion of

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<sup>1</sup>For a more detailed study of the relevance of the Old Testament in the life of believers, see Dallas Burdette, "Relevance of the Old Testament," in Dallas Burdette, *Old Texts through New Eyes: Reexamination of Misunderstood Scriptures* (Longwood, FL: Xulon, 2009), 1-25.

righteousness by faith (Romans 3:21-26), he then responds to a question about the Law: “Do we, then, nullify the law by this faith? Not at all! Rather, we uphold the law” (3:31). Even though one is “justified by faith apart from observing the law” (3:28), this fact, in and of itself, does not do away with the Law of God. This is why Paul tells Timothy:

But as for you, **continue in what you have learned** and have become convinced of, because you know those from whom you learned it,<sup>15</sup> and how from infancy you have known the holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus.<sup>16</sup> All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness,<sup>17</sup> so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work. (2 Timothy 3:14-15)

This tutoring by his grandmother and mother reinforces a statement of Paul to the Christians at Rome: “the law is holy, and the commandment is holy, righteous and good” (Romans 7:12). For this reason, Paul could also say: “For in my inner being **I delight** in God’s law” (7:22). No Christian is “under” law, but all Christians are still “subject” to the Law of God. All believers should appreciate the Old Testament writings. How do we feel about God’s instructions in His Holy Word? Do we find happiness in the “law of the LORD”? God’s Law sets forth the parameters of morality. **If there is a moral law, there must be a Moral Lawgiver.** Also, the Law, the prophets, and the psalms also set forth the coming of God’s new kingdom along with His New Covenant, which is none other than Jesus Himself.

Isaiah (739 BC) gives a statement from Jehovah concerning the Son that He would send to be a covenant to the people: “I will keep you and will make you to be a covenant for the people” (Isaiah 49:8). In this same chapter, God also says, “I will also make you a light for the Gentiles” (49: 6). No doubt, Paul reflected upon the words of Jesus many times as he Himself read the words of the Old Testament. Shortly before Jesus’ return to the Father, He instructed His disciples, as reported by Luke, concerning the relevance of the Old Testament writings:

He said to them, This is what I told you while I was still with you: Everything must be fulfilled that is written about me in the Law of Moses, the Prophets and the Psalms.”<sup>45</sup> Then **he opened their minds so they could understand the Scriptures.**<sup>46</sup> He told them, “This is what is written: The Christ will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day,<sup>47</sup> and repentance and forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem.<sup>48</sup> You are witnesses of these things.<sup>49</sup> I am going to send you what my Father has promised; but stay in the city until you have been clothed with power from on high.” (Luke 24:44-49)

## DELIGHT IN THE INSTRUCTIONS OF GOD

### Paul and the Psalmist

The above comments about the authority of the Law help to prepare us for a more meaningful approach to the Book of Psalms. Psalm 1 sets forth contrasting ideas—a God-centered life versus a self-centered life. For the believer, ultimate reality is a life that is God-

centered. Are our lives God-centered? Or are our lives self-absorbed?<sup>2</sup> Or are we thinking only about the present moment of time. What about eternity? The psalmist speaks of reality that is God-centered, not man-centered. The psalmist calls attention to two ways (1) the way of the righteous and (2) the way of the wicked. One way exhibits dependence upon God, and the other way exhibits independence from God. As we reflect upon this psalm, we should ask ourselves the following questions: Am I walking in the counsel of God or am I walking in the counsel of wicked men? Where is our enjoyment? Do we have pleasure in reading and meditating upon God's written Revelation? Have we read Psalm 1 recently? We should read and listen attentively to the words of the psalmist as he seeks to capture the hearts of God's people with a description of two ways:

Blessed is the man who does not **walk** in the counsel of the wicked or **stand** in the way of sinners or **sit** in the seat of mockers. <sup>2</sup>But his delight is in the law of the LORD, and on his law he meditates day and night. <sup>3</sup>He is like a tree planted by streams of water, which yields its fruit in season and whose leaf does not wither. Whatever he does prospers. <sup>4</sup>Not so the wicked! They are like chaff that the wind blows away. <sup>5</sup>Therefore the wicked will not stand in the judgment, nor sinners in the assembly of the righteous. <sup>6</sup>For the LORD watches over the way of the righteous, but the way of the wicked will perish. (Psalm 1:1-6)

## PSALM 1 AND THE SERMON ON THE MOUNT

Upon reading Psalm 1, we cannot help but recall the words of Jesus in His Sermon on the Mount: "Blessed (**μακάριοι**, *makarioi*) are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven" (Matthew 5:3). This English word *blessed* or happy is equivalent to the Hebrew word **אַשְׁרֵי**, *'ăš-rê*, which is also translated into English as *blessed*. Jesus employs the main outline of Psalm 1 in His Sermon on the Mount. Jesus' message develops the character, the influence, the conduct, and the destiny of the one who listens to the Word of God. On the other hand, Jesus graphically depicts, as did the psalmist, the utter destruction of the individual who ignores God. Just as the psalmist contemplates two ways, so also Jesus speaks of two ways: (1) the narrow gate and narrow road, and (2) the wide gate and wide road (Matthew 7:13-14).

**Psalm 1 begins with a beatitude**—"Blessed is the man"—not with a prayer or a hymn. It is significant that he starts with a statement about human life. Immediately the psalmist calls upon individuals to consider the teaching about life and the consequences of not submitting our lives to God. As this psalm is analyzed, hopefully we, who are reading this message, will consider our own destiny—happiness or destruction. Which destination are we following? Are we like the righteous? Or, are we like the wicked? Which?

One way to determine where we are is to consider our reaction to the instructions of God. If we do not joy in God's instruction, then we are not happy, that is to say, we do not have the peace of God in us that is beyond the peace that the world gives. This psalm sets forth what it really means to be "happy" or "blessed." The peace that the psalmist speaks of is a peace with

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<sup>2</sup>I am deeply indebted to J. Clinton McCann, Jr., *Psalms, The New Interpreters Bible*, Vol., 4 (Nashville: Abingdon, 1996), 683-687, for many helpful insights in making this sermon relevant to the lives of God's people for today.

God that is beyond description, even in the face of catastrophe. Immediately, the writer lets us know what the happy person will not do (Psalm 1:1). He commences this striking psalm with negatives: “Blessed is the man who does **not walk** in the counsel of the wicked or **stand** in the way of sinners or **sit** in the seat of mockers” (1:1).

## **SHARP CONTRAST DRAWN BETWEEN THE RIGHTEOUS AND THE WICKED**

Verse 1 of this psalm sharpens the contrast between the wicked and the righteous: “For the LORD watches over the way of the righteous” (1:6). As we observe “the way of the righteous” as presented in this short psalm, we, too, cannot help but reflect upon “the way of sinners” (1:1), which way brings God’s wrath upon the unrepentant. This psalm offers two fundamentally different life styles. The compiler of the Book of Psalms lays out the final outcome from the beginning to end. The person who enjoys God’s instructions is the person who is “happy” (1:1), but the individual who does not take pleasure in God’s Word will “perish” (1:6). The word *happy* (אֲשֶׁרֵי, ’ăš-rê) begins this psalm and the last word *perish* concludes this Psalm. The word *happy* begins with the first letter of the Hebrew alphabet (א, ’, a) and the word *perish* (תָּבַחַ, tō(’)·bēd’) begins with the last letter of the Hebrew alphabet (ת, t). **This psalm is an all-embracing arrangement of what it means to be happy or blessed.**

### **The Counsel of the Ungodly**

The vocabulary of this psalm sets forth the distinction between the wicked and the righteous. We perceive three distinctive words that characterize the ungodly: (1) wicked, (2) sinners, and (3) scoffers [1:1]. We, as believers, refuse to expose ourselves to the counsel of the wicked. We will not adopt the guidance of the ungodly; in other words, the ones who take pleasure in God’s Law will reject the ideas and attitudes of men and women who have no place for God in their lives. Have we adopted the ways of the world?

Who is the *blessed*, or *happy*, man or woman? Is it not the person who avoids places where the atmosphere is not helpful to wholesome thinking and high ethical standards? Surely, the **counsel** of the wicked is out of bounds for the righteous. The Holy Spirit through Solomon says, “The heart of the righteous weighs its answers, but the mouth of the wicked gushes evil” (Proverbs 15:28). Again, Solomon issues the stern warning: “There is a way that seems right to a man, but in the end it leads to death” (16:25).

Today, atheism is on the rise. The late Christopher Hitchens (1949-2011) sought to undermine Christianity. Today, Sam Harris (b. 1967) and Richard Dawkins (b. 1942) are still seeking to undermine the Christian faith. The council of these three individuals is filled with the council of the ungodly. **Fortunately for the Christian community, Douglas Wilson and Joel McDurmon have refuted the ungodly philosophy of these three antagonists of the**

**Christian faith who wish to lead people into the path of atheism.**<sup>3</sup> What happens to a society that does not know which way to turn to gain an understanding of right and wrong? When confused moral philosophers moralize from uncertain starting points, error compounds itself. A self-caused universe does not communicate morality, a silence underscored by Stephen Crane:

A man said to the universe:  
“Sir, I exist!”  
“However,” replied the  
universe,  
“the fact has not created in  
me  
A sense of obligation.”<sup>4</sup>

**In a naturalistic world, there exists neither a sense of obligation in the universe, nor a demand from me.**<sup>5</sup> There must be a Moral Lawgiver (God) for morality to make sense.

### **The Way of Sinners**

The second negative is that the righteous individual will not “**stand** in the way of sinners.” In other words, this person refuses to stop and associate with the rebellious offenders. To reinforce the words of the psalmist, we should call to mind the words of Paul:

Do not be misled: “Bad company corrupts good character.”<sup>34</sup> Come back to your senses as you ought, and stop sinning; for there are some who are ignorant of God—I say this to your shame. (1 Corinthians 15:33-34)

God’s people often times have to change their friends. Why? Remember the Holy Spirit says, “Bad company corrupts good character.” **When we cut the optic nerve of the soul, we become weak, and it is difficult to make moral decisions.** If we should take a poll of individuals in the various fellowships of God’s people, we would find that there are untold stories of children who have lost their faith through “bad company.” For us to “stand in the way of sinners” means that we adopt the rebellious life style of the wicked—a life without God. **Steve Turner hit-the-nail-on-the-head when he eloquently captured a life without God.** If we wish to see the stark reality of “chance” as the origin of the universe, we should read Steve

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<sup>3</sup>See the following books, **Douglas Wilson**, *The Deluded Atheist: A Response to Richard Dawkins’ The God Delusion* (Powder Springs, GA: American Vision Press, 2008); **Douglas Wilson**, *God Is—How Christianity Explains Everything : A Reply to Christopher Hitchens’ God Is Not Great: How Religion Poisons Everything* (Powder Springs, GA: American Vision Press, 2008); **Douglas Wilson**, *Letter from a Christian Citizen: A Response to Letter to a Christian Nation by Sam Harris* (Powder Springs, GA: American Vision Press, 2007); **Joel McDurmon**, *The Return of the Village Atheist* (Powder Springs, GA: American Vision Press, 2007).

<sup>4</sup>Cited by **Ravi Zacharias**, *The Real Face of Atheism* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2004), 52.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid.

Turner's poem entitled *Chance*, which is an excellent example of the philosophy of atheism. Listen to him as he draws a frightening picture of "chance" in all its nakedness:

If chance be  
The Father of all flesh,  
Disaster is his rainbow in  
the sky  
And when you hear

State of emergency  
Sniper kills ten  
Troops on rampage  
Whites go looting  
Bomb blasts school

It is but the sound of man  
worshipping his maker<sup>6</sup>

**When we do not shutter at unethical behavior of the ungodly, then we indicate that we have lost some of our sensitivity to sin.** This exhortation does not mean that we can have no contact with the unrighteous. If so, how can we reach sinners for Jesus? Perhaps, one of the most famous of all Jesus' sayings is found in the Gospel of Matthew:

As Jesus went on from there, he saw a man named Matthew sitting at the tax collector's booth. "Follow me," he told him, and Matthew got up and followed him. <sup>10</sup> While Jesus was having dinner at Matthew's house, many tax collectors and sinners came and ate with him and his disciples. <sup>11</sup> When the Pharisees saw this, they asked his disciples, "Why does your teacher eat with tax collectors and sinners?" <sup>12</sup> On hearing this, Jesus said, "It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. <sup>13</sup> But go and learn what this means: 'I desire mercy, not sacrifice.'<sup>a</sup> For I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners." (Matthew 9:9-13)

### **The Seat of the Mockers**

The third progression in this description of what the righteous person is not is associated with sitting. The righteous person will not "sit in the seat of the mockers." In other words, he or she refuses to sit down with those who turn their noses up at God and make fun of the things of God. The three verbs—**walk**, **stand**, and **sit**—highlight the importance of how we position ourselves in our daily walk. The negatives set forth by the psalmist describe the motion or wavering among the unrestrained. These three verbs with the negative, prepare us for the positive presentation of the happy or blessed person whose fruitfulness is made possible by a rootedness in a good setting (1:3).

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<sup>6</sup>Steve Turner, *Up to Date: Poems 1968-1982*, "Chance" (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1976, 1980, 1982), 107.

<sup>a</sup>Hosea 6:6

## THE RIGHTEOUS DELIGHT IN THE TORAH

Many tragedies can be avoided by the wise decision to get pleasure from the Law of God. Righteous persons decline the ways and attitudes of the wicked that do not accept the behavior that God's Word demands. The psalmist stated in denial terms what the righteous would not do. Now he sets forth the **affirmative behavior** of the righteous. He says, "But his delight is in the law of the LORD, and in his law he meditates day and night" (Psalm 1:2). How can we be strong enough to reject the ways of the wicked? The psalmist discloses the secret; he says that it is our thrill in the Law of the Lord. In other words, our hearts and our **interests** and our **affections** are upon heavenly things, not earthly things. Unfortunately, many Christians cite Colossians 3:1-3 for ethical behavior, nevertheless, this teaching by Paul is related to Judaism versus Christianity. Even though the following citation contains a principle that is true concerning godly conduct, nevertheless, this Scripture is a warning to the Colossians not to forsake Christianity and revert back to Judaism. The Book of Hebrews also sets forth this same warning—do not turn away from Christ to that which is passing away (Hebrews 8:13).<sup>8</sup>

Since, then, you have been raised with Christ, **set your hearts** on things above (the New Heaven and Earth—Revelation 21:1-5), where Christ is seated at the right hand of God. <sup>2</sup> **Set your minds** on things above, not on earthly things (Judaism—Old Heaven and Earth—Hebrews 8:13; Matthew 5:17-18). <sup>3</sup> For you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God. (Colossians 3:1-3)

## BIBLICAL EXAMPLES OF DELIGHT IN THE TORAH

### Paul

As the upright person views the way of the wicked, he or she says, "that is not my life." For every believer, his or her life is filled with ecstasy in the torah (תּוֹרָה, *tô-rā(h)*) of the Lord. It is food for his or her hungry soul. It is as Jesus says to Satan: "It is written: '**Man does not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God**'" (Matthew 4:4). It is also in this same respect that Paul could tell the Christians at Rome: "For in my inner being I delight in God's law" (Romans 7:22). Paul recognizes that his body is the temple of the Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 6:19-20), and, since this is so, then his enjoyment is to learn and think of God's will for his life. If you are a Christian, you, too, are a temple of God. **Is your satisfaction found in reading and in hearing and in thinking the Word of God?** How frequently do we read the Word? How often do we think about spiritual things? We are not only to "seek" heaven, but we are to "think" heaven.

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<sup>8</sup> See Don K. Preston, *Mind Displaced: Colossians 3:1-2 and Dispensationalism* (Ardmore, OK: JaDon Management, 2017). When I cite Scripture, I must, first of all, apply the Scripture according to context. See also Tony Everett Denton, *Hebrews: From Flawed to Flawless Fulfilled!* (USA: Tony Denton, 2012). He unfolds the Book of Hebrews in context—a warning to Christians against returning to Judaism. For encouragement for godly living, see Galatians 5:16-26; Ephesians 4:17-5:21; Colossians 3:18-25; Hebrews—Chapters 12 and 13.

## Mary, the Sister of Martha

A classic example of what Jesus is talking about is found in the story of Jesus' visit to the home of Mary and Martha. On this occasion Luke says that Mary “**sat at the Lord's feet listening to what he said**” (Luke 10:39). Do we really and truly relish the words of God with this kind of intense yearning? Do we devote time to reflect upon God's Holy Scripture? How often do we actually read and study the Sacred Word?

### The Bereans' Interest in the Old Testament

Another example, mentioned earlier, of studying the Word of God is found among the Bereans. Once more, Luke reveals the nature of study that is exemplary: “Now the Bereans were of more noble character than the Thessalonians, for they received the message with great eagerness and examined the Scriptures every day to see if what Paul said was true” (Acts 17:11). Do we take the time to examine the Scriptures on a daily basis? Have we examined the message of salvation concerning Jesus as God's way of salvation? Do we examine the Scriptures daily to determine the kind of behavior that pleases God? Can we say as the psalmist says in Psalm 119:105: “Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light for my path”?

### THE GODLY VERSUS THE UNGODLY

The ungodly person's interest and affections are not on spiritual things. On the other hand, the godly man and woman delight in God's Torah or instructions. The psalmist commends the conduct that is reflective and meditative on the Law of the Lord. When we are concerned with and delight in the instructions of God, then we will mull over the Holy Scriptures day and night. Again, can we say as the psalmist says: “Oh, how I love your law! I meditate on it all day long” (Psalm 119:97). This word *torah* is much more comprehensive than just the Law of Moses in the Pentateuch. It is in the written *Torah* that we gain wisdom for living a life that is pleasing to God. The psalmist invites and expects the “happy man” to receive and read the *Torah* as Scripture. It is through the *Torah* that the Lord is able to reach, touch, and shape the soul (see Psalm 19 and Psalm 119). David drives home various reasons for reflecting upon the Law of God:

The law of the LORD is perfect, **reviving the soul**. The statutes of the LORD are trustworthy, **making wise the simple**.<sup>8</sup> The precepts of the LORD are right, **giving joy to the heart**. The commands of the LORD are radiant, **giving light to the eyes**.<sup>9</sup> The fear of the LORD is pure, **enduring forever**. The ordinances of the LORD are **sure and altogether righteous**.<sup>10</sup> They are more precious than gold, than much pure gold; they are sweeter than honey, than honey from the comb.<sup>11</sup> By them is your servant warned; in keeping them there is great reward. (Psalm 19:7-11)

## AVOID THE SINNERS' INFLUENCE AND EFFECTS

As explained above, this psalm (Psalm 1) does not call those whose “delight is in the law of the Lord” to withdraw from society (see also 1 Corinthians 5:9-11). Rather, the call is to avoid the sinner’s influences and effects on our personal walk with God. What differentiates the wicked from the righteous is this: our response to the reality of God and our acceptance of God’s written Revelation. **Psalm 1 teaches that life is a journey.** This psalm employs two similes to capture graphically the situation of the wicked versus the righteous. To do this, he uses the imagery of the tree (עץ, *ēṣ*) and the chaff (קליפה, *mōṣ*) to highlight two contrasting similes.<sup>9</sup> These two nouns end in the same letter (ץ, *ṣ*), which appear to highlight the contrast between the two similes.

He is like a tree (עץ, *ēṣ*) planted by streams of water, which yields its fruit in season and whose leaf does not wither. Whatever he does prospers. <sup>4</sup>Not so the wicked! They are like chaff (קליפה, *mōṣ*) that the wind blows away. (Psalm 1:3-4)

### THE TREE AND ITS IMPLICATIONS IN THE LIFE OF THE BELIEVER

The water allows the tree to resist drought and to bear fruit. The Word of God allows the believer to endure drought and to bear fruit—even in the face of adversity. On the other hand, the wicked have no roots, no stability, and no place to stand. The ungodly are grounded and guided within themselves—no connection with the source of life. Each person has one’s own distinctive destiny. **The believer can ride out the storms of life. Even in the face of sorrow, distress, misfortune, trials, and tribulations, God’s children simply dig deeper into the rich supply of peace that only God can give.** Since we believe in God, this belief enables us to dig in and remain faithful to God. We, as believers, believe in the Resurrection of Jesus, which belief fortifies the life of God’s children.

I am reminded of a true story that **Michael Green** (1930-2019), British theologian, Anglican priest, apologist, and author, tells about a Russian lecturer and a member of the communist party who addressed a packed house on the subject of Christ’s Resurrection. Prior to this story, he relates the story of a Ghanaian (ˈgä-nē-ən) undergraduate, who found Jesus and said,

I know Jesus lives, because I meet him every day and share fellowship with him. Fellowship can exist only between people who are living. I think that the truth that Jesus lives is something that one can experience rather than describe.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>9</sup>Simile (ˈsi-mə-(,)lē): A figure of speech that uses *like*, *as*, or *as if* to compare two essentially different objects, actions, or attributes that share some aspect of similarity. Once more, a simile is a figure of speech comparing two unlike things that is often introduced by *like* or *as* (as in *cheeks like roses*).

<sup>10</sup>Michael Green, *Man Alive* (London, England: InterVarsity Press, 1967), 28.

Green comments on this story and then recounts another story that he heard from a Czechoslovakian theologian concerning the Russian lecturer. The following account is as he told the story:

That is very true. And it is borne out by this story a Czechoslovakian theologian told me. A Russian lecturer, a member of the Communist party, was addressing a packed audience on the subject of the resurrection of Jesus Christ. He spoke at considerable length, seeking to discredit it. At the end, an Orthodox priest rose and asked if he might reply. He was warned that he could only have five minutes. ‘Five seconds is all I shall need,’ was his reply. He turned to the audience, and gave the delightful Easter greeting, characteristic of the Eastern Orthodox. ‘*Cristos anesthē*’, he cried, ‘Christ is risen.’ Back with a deafening roar came the traditional reply from the crowded hall. ‘*Alēthos anesthē*’, ‘Truly he is risen.’<sup>11</sup>

## HAPPINESS OR MATERIAL PROSPERITY

Our faith in Jesus’ Resurrection ensures our acceptance of Psalm 1 as a psalm that will entice us to adhere to God as the Moral Lawgiver of the universe. God’s children still battle the warfare of unbelievers. Jesus warned His disciples about the troubles that lay ahead: “I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world” (John 16:33). Earlier, in this same conversation with the disciples, our Lord spoke of peace: “Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid” (14:27). Even though we may experience trouble; nevertheless, we still experience the inner peace that no one can take away. Paul expresses it this way:

Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword? <sup>36</sup> As it is written: “**For your sake we face death all day long; we are considered as sheep to be slaughtered.**”<sup>c37</sup> No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. <sup>38</sup> For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons,<sup>d</sup> neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, <sup>39</sup> neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord. (Romans 8:35-39)

## PSALMS IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

As we reflect upon these words of Paul, we cannot help but notice that Paul cites Psalms 44:22: “Yet for your sake we face death all day long; we are considered as sheep to be slaughtered” (Romans 8:36). Is it any wonder that he instructed the Christians at Ephesus and Colossae to sing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs (Ephesians 5:19; Colossians 3:16). We can rely upon this psalm and all psalms for spiritual strength, but this is not so for the individual who does not trust in God. The one who does not trust in God builds his house

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<sup>11</sup>Ibid.

<sup>c</sup> Psalm 44:22

<sup>d</sup> Or *nor heavenly rulers*

upon the sand, but the one who puts his trust in God builds his house upon a rock (See Matthew 7:24-27—The Wise and Foolish Builders).

## GOD'S SOVEREIGNTY VERSUS AUTONOMOUS BEHAVIOR

Psalm 1 calls attention to autonomous behavior, that is, actions not under the umbrella of God's Law. The effect of the wicked is to produce a society of isolated selves. Solomon again captures concisely the way of the wicked: "A wicked man listens to evil lips; a liar pays attention to a malicious tongue" (Proverbs 17:4). The person who fails to make connection with God as the source of life cannot be happy; that is, he or she cannot enjoy the happiness or peace that is beyond this terrestrial world. Once more Solomon says, "There is a way that seems right to a man, but in the end it leads to death" (16:25). **We should read again the words of the psalmist as he summarizes the ultimate end of those who desire self-directed, self-controlled, and self-governing behavior:** "the way of the wicked will perish" (Psalm 1:1). The only hope for humanity is a belief in the One True God and His Son Jesus Christ. Dr. Ravi Zacharias (1946-2020) relates a story that he heard from Dr. Billy Graham (1918-2018) about Jesus and His Resurrection.

Dr. Billy Graham told of an occasion when German Chancellor Konrad Adenauer [1876-1967] was in conversation with him. Mr. Adenauer asked Dr. Graham, "Do you believe in the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead?" When Dr. Graham immediately answered that indeed he did, there was a long silence from the Chancellor, and then he said, "**Outside of the resurrection of Jesus Christ, I know of no other hope for mankind.**"<sup>12</sup> (Emphasis mine—bold)

**Viktor E. Frankl** (1905-1997), a Jewish psychiatrist and author, survived the Nazi Holocaust of Germany and experienced untold suffering in his confinement at Auschwitz. **Hitler** (1889-1945), who was influenced by **Nietzsche's** (1844-1900) philosophy of materialism, created a state in which, so they thought, they killed God. As a result of this atheistic philosophy, millions were exterminated through **Adolf Hitler**, **Joseph Stalin** (1879-1953), and **Benito Mussolini** (1883-1945). In his book *The Doctor & the Soul: From Psychotherapy to Logotherapy*, he paints a graphic and detailed account of one who lives his or her life without God. Pay attention to him as he describes the philosophy of pure materialism:

**If we present a man with a concept of man which is not true**, we may well corrupt him. When we present man as an automaton of reflexes, as a mind-machine, as a bundle of instincts, as a pawn of drives and reactions, as a mere product of instinct, heredity, and environment, we feed the nihilism [ 'nī-(h)ə- |i-zəm ] an extreme form of skepticism that denies all existence] to which modern man is, in any case prone.

I became acquainted with the last stage of that corruption in my second concentration camp, Auschwitz. The gas chambers of Auschwitz were the ultimate consequence of the theory that man is nothing but the product of heredity and environment—or, as the Nazi liked to say, of "Blood and

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<sup>12</sup>Ravi Zacharias, *The Real Face of Atheism* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1990, 2004), 148.

Soil.” I am absolutely convinced that the gas chambers of Auschwitz, Treblinka, and Maidanek were ultimately prepared not in some Ministry or other in Berlin, but rather at the desks and in the lecture halls of nihilistic Scientists and philosophers.<sup>13</sup> (Emphasis mine—bold)

The choice presented in Psalm 1 is always up to date. We may decide to be self-directed as Hitler, Stalin, and Mussolini were in their decision to reject the Old and New Testament writings as inspired of God. On the other hand, we may select to be open to the teachings of God. Where do we stand? Are we self-directed or God directed? Are we willing to give up self-sovereignty and to live under the sovereignty of God? Are we burdened with the cares of the world? Are we sinking under the hand of despair? Can our problems separate us from God? Have we taken our difficulties to God in prayer? What is the answer?

Have we humbled ourselves under the mighty hand of God? Listen to Peter as he admonishes Christians “scattered throughout Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia and Bithynia” (1 Peter 1:1) of the coming calamities (destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70): “Humble yourselves, therefore, under God’s mighty hand, that he may lift you up in due time. Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you” (1 Peter 5:6-7). Can we say as Job, “**Shall we accept good from God, and not trouble?**” (Job 2:10). For the Psalter as a whole, persecution is not incompatible with the happiness or peace that God gives that the world cannot give. Just a casual reading of the psalms reveals that God’s people are not freed from troubles.

## CONCLUSION

From a positive viewpoint, Psalm 1 is a psalm that is God-centered for the righteous; on the other hand, Psalm 1, from a negative viewpoint, zeros in on the self-centeredness of the wicked. This psalm, as well as the rest of the Psalter, portrays happiness as existing in our delight in the teachings of God; true happiness is not enjoying ourselves in self-centeredness, which is a way of destruction. True happiness is delight in God’s Law. It is in this same vein that Jesus speaks to Satan: “It is written: ‘Man does not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God’” (Matthew 4:4). The goal of life is found not in self-fulfillment of our fleshly desires, but rather in praising God. For the righteous, prosperity consists not of material gains, but rather of spiritual gains. We, as believers, know that our lives are to be lived for God and that our lives are secured by God, even in the face of persecutions or trials.

We who delight in God’s Law will ultimately experience life beyond the grave, but the individual who does not delight in God’s Law will perish. Is it any wonder that Paul writes: “For in my inner being I delight in God’s law.” Even though we cannot be justified through God’s Law, nevertheless, our delight is still in God’s Law.<sup>14</sup> We do not make void the Law through faith, but rather we uphold God’s Law through faith. Listen, once more, to Paul as he

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<sup>13</sup>Viktor E. Frankl (1905-1997), *The Doctor & the Soul: From Psychotherapy to Logotherapy*, translated from the German by Richard and Clara Winston (New York: Vintage Books, 1973), xxi.

<sup>14</sup>For a more detailed study between the Law and the Gospel, see Dallas Burdette, “Overview of Romans,” in Dallas Burdette, *From Legalism to Freedom: A Spiritual Narrative of Liberation* (Longwood, FL: Xulon, 2008), 249-281.

explains Law and faith: “Do we, then, nullify the law by this faith? Not at all! Rather, we uphold the law.”

Have our beliefs in God made a difference in our lives? What does Psalm 1 mean to us? A denial of God sets forth a life without any moral laws. A life without God is seen in the lives of **Adolph Hitler** (1889-1945), **Joseph Stalin** (1879-1953), and **Benito Mussolini** (1883-1945). Life without God is a life lived without a consciousness of biblical morality, that is to say, a morality without God’s absolutes, which morality has no anchor to hold it in place. When we uphold God’s Law, our ethical behavior is rooted in God’s love. When we uphold the moral Law of God, we express God’s law of love. Our belief in God makes a difference in our moral behavior. **Ravi Zacharias**, former president of Ravi Zacharias International Ministries, tells the story of a well-known social critic’s, **Dennis Prager** (b.1948), words to the Oxford atheistic philosopher **Jonathan Glover** (b.1941) during a debate (March 3, 1993) on God’s existence. He raised the tough, or thorny, question concerning a problematical breakdown on a lonely street in Los Angeles. **Prager’s question touched a raw nerve of reality**, which drew laughter from the audience:

If you, Professor Glover, were stranded at the midnight hour in a desolate Los Angeles street and if, as you stepped out of your car with fear and trembling, you were suddenly to hear the weight of pounding footsteps behind you, and you saw ten burly young men who had just stepped out of a dwelling coming toward you, would it or would it not make a difference to you to know that they were coming from a Bible study?<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>15</sup>I am indebted to Ravi Zacharias, *The Real Face of Atheism*, revised and updated edition (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2004), 135, for this story.