

Two Ways to Live

Psalm 1

The blessed righteous and the perishing wicked. The difference is how they respond to God's word.

Open your Bible's with me, if you will, to Psalm chapter 1. I want to speak with you today about two ways to live. When you think of the bible as a whole one might be tempted to think that God's will for us is very complicated. After all, my copy of the Bible consists of 1,360 pages that are full of commands, warnings, promises, and other important things. When you start thinking of the Bible like that, you can start feeling a little overwhelmed. But this morning I want us to be collectively reminded that the Christian life is really not very complicated.

When you boil it all down, there are really only two ways to live. One way is pleasing to the Lord, the other provokes his censure. One way brings God's blessing, the other brings God's wrath. One way leads to eternal life, the other leads to judgment.

Psalm 1 stands as the appointed sentry guarding the entrance gate to book of Psalms. You must have dealings with him if you desire enter into this treasury or wisdom and worship. Saint Jerome often said that the first Psalm, is "the Holy Spirit's preface to the Psalter.¹ James Montgomery Boice taught that Psalm 1 is the Gateway to all of the other Psalms. Conversely, it may be argued that the other Psalms are all expositions of this first psalm.²

The text before us is a short psalm, only six verses. But in it God reveals to us profound, practical, and essential truths about how to live in a manner that pleases Him and brings us, His people, great blessing.

Before we study it, however, let's stand together and read it.

Read Psalm 1

¹ John Stott, *Favorite, Psalms*, (Grand Rapids, Baker Books, 1988), 6

² James Montgomery Boice, *Psalms Vol. 1* (Grand Rapids, Baker Books, 1994), 14

The Psalm before us this morning offers a profound lesson in contrasts. In it we discover

Two Distinct Kinds of People

Two Alternative Worldviews

Two Contrasting Descriptions

Two Different Destinies

Let's begin by learning about the....

I. Two Distinct Kinds of People:

1. The reason there are only two ways to live is because in God's mind there are only two kinds of people. There are the righteous and there are the wicked. Notice in verse six how the Holy Spirit lays down this ultimate contrast. As kind of a summary to all that has gone before, the Psalmist writes, "The Lord knows the way of the Righteous, but the way of the Wicked shall perish." The author of this Psalm refers to the wicked three times, and also brands them as sinners (v. 1&5), and scoffers (v. 1).

2. Now, I realize that it may bother some of you to think of human beings in such a reductionistic kind of way (Righteous or wicked). No one likes to be stereotyped. We prefer to think of ourselves and individuals who are uniquely valuable because of our distinct qualities and gifts. And certainly, there is a place for that kind of thinking. But ultimately, when we all stand before God on the last day the only thing that will matter is whether you are accounted by God as righteous or wicked.

3. The problem for every honest Christian, however, is that we all know deep in our hearts there is much wickedness. We still find ourselves doing what we don't want to do, and NOT doing the things we want to do. We desire to do good but find ourselves doing what we know is sinful. Until we see Jesus face to face, sin is still with us. Let's be honest! What honest person can seriously think of himself as truly righteous.

4. It will repay us to ask the question before we dive into this text: If the wicked are sinners and the Righteous are also sinners, what's the difference between the two. The

difference must be profound if on the day of judgment, the righteous stand and the wicked perish. So, what is the difference between the righteous and the wicked.

5. I think we find the answer to this question in Psalm 32. Turn with me to Psalm 32 and let's see if we can sort this out. We don't have time to study the whole Psalms, so let's make some pertinent observations.

A. Read v. 1-2.

1) Notice that this Psalm also speaks of the "blessed."

2) Who are the "blessed" in this passage? Those (1) "whose transgression is forgiven," and those "against whom the Lord counts no iniquity."

B. In verses 3-5 David reveals the anguish he experienced before confessing his sin and being forgiving (read. V 5).

C. Read v. 6. Notice the term "godly." The godly are those who, rather than delighting in their sin, seek the forgiveness of God for their sins. We might call them "godly sinners."

D. Read v. 10. Here David uses the same word we find in Psalm 1, "the wicked." They have many sorrows. But the "righteous" (v. 11) are to be glad and shout for joy.

E. So what is the difference between those who are considered "wicked" and those who are considered "righteous" and "godly." The difference is that the righteous have had their sins forgiven. Their "transgressions" are "covered (1), and God does not count their iniquity against them (2).

6. Beloved, this is O.T. teaching on the doctrine of justification. Sinners are declared righteous (justified) by the grace through faith. So the difference between the righteous and the wicked in Psalm 1 (and throughout the Psalms) is that the wicked love their sin, while the righteous hate their sin, they confess their sin, which is evidenced that they have already been forgiven of their sin.

7. Many scholars believe Psalm 2 is the companion of Psalm 1 helping to reveal the theology of the Psalter. Notice how psalm 2 ends: "Blessed are all who take refuge in Him."

8. So who are the "blessed" in Psalm 1? They are the people of God. They are not perfect. They still sin, but they hate their sin, they confess their sin, and they are forgiven. What I want you to see here, beloved, is that if you know the Lord Jesus Christ, the promise of this Psalm is for you! You are among those who are blessed by the Lord.

9. But what does it mean to be “Blessed.” The word blessed literally means “happy.” In the O.T., however, the word has a much deeper meaning. To say that one is “blessed” is to use covenant language. When God established his covenant with Israel he promised that they would be uniquely and personally blessed by Him. He would bless the fruit of the womb, and the fruit of the ground, your grain, your oil and your herds, etc. (Deut. 7:13).

10. Then Jesus picks up on this same language when he preaches his first sermon (Matt. 5-7) which begins with eight statements of blessing: “Blessed are the poor in Spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of God. Blessed are those who mourn for they shall be comforted. Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth, etc.

11. To be one of God’s people by grace through faith is to be one who is uniquely blessed. If you are a follower of Christ you are the special object of God’s blessing. Upon you He pours out “grace upon grace.” Paul says in Eph. 1 that you are blessed with every spiritual blessing in Christ Jesus.”

12. The unbeliever, however, does not know the special blessing of God. Rather, he is under God’s curse. But he is under God’s curse NOT because he has committed some unforgivable sin. No, the wicked are so called simply because they deny the most obvious and important reality in the universe; namely, that there is a God and we are accountable to Him. That’s why they are also called the “ungodly.” They simply live as if there is no God.

13. The ungodly man can be someone who goes to church week after week. He is often very respectable and can make a good neighbor. He may be kind to the poor and faithful to his employer. His great sin, however, is that he gives God no part in his life. He simply lives as seems best to him without any consideration of the God who created him. This is what it means to be ungodly.

14. And so the Psalmist speaks of two distinct kind of people. But notice also that these people have...

II. Two Alternative World Views:

1. Notice how the author describes this distinction in verse 1. The man/woman whom God blesses does not “walk in the counsel of the wicked, nor stands in the way of sinners, not sits in the seat of scoffers.”

2. The word “walk” means to go with the flow. The world is forever giving counsel that is contrary to the word of God. They world says,

- If the cashier gives you too much change, you should keep it.
- If you believe the government is taking too much of your money, cheat on your taxes.
- If you need some entertainment, a little immorality on the internet is not a problem.
- If you need to make the sale, it’s OK to lie a little.
- If you open your car door and accidentally damage the car parked next to you, just drive away and act like nothing happened.

But the righteous man doesn’t go along with such counsel NO Matter how many others may do it.

3. Nor does he stand in the path of sinners. To “stand” means to remain among them, or to present one’s self in service to them.

4. Nor does he “sit in the seat of scoffers.” To “sit” means to dwell with. It is to take your seat in the assembly of like-minded people. “Scoffers” are those who mock, or ridicule the things of God.

5. There seems to be a dangerous progressing at work here. If you begin accepting some of the counsel of the wicked, it won’t be long till you may find yourself standing in the path of sinners. So, it should be no surprise some time later when you wake up and realize that for some time you have actually taken your seat and have begun feeling quite at home with those who scoff at the teaching of God’s word. The worldview of the “wicked,” “sinners,” and “scoffers” interprets the world NOT through the lens of God’s word, but through the lens of their own godless desires.

6. But that’s not true of the “blessed” “Righteous” man. Notice verse two, “But his delight is in the law of the Lord, and in His law he meditates day and night.”

7. The most profound difference between the believer and the unbeliever is that while the unbeliever (the “wicked”) interprets his world through the lens of his sinful desires, the blessed/righteous man interprets the world through the lens of Scripture. “His delight is in the law of the Lord.”

8. “Law” here is the word “Torah.” It simply means the teaching. It refers to all that God has revealed to man through His word. The blessed man meditates on the teaching of the Bible day and night.

9. To “meditate” means to ponder and think deeply about something. Charles Spurgeon distinguishes between reading God’s word and meditating in it when he writes:

Reading reaps the wheat, meditation threshes it, grinds it and makes it into bread. Reading is like the ox feeding – meditation is digesting when chewing the cud. It is not only reading that does us good, but the soul inwardly feeding on it and digesting it.³

The word for meditate here literally means “to moan.” When he come to the discover of the meaning of a text and how it should be brought to bear upon his life, the righteous man says, “Mmh! It is an expression of delight in the weightiness and impactfulness of scripture.

10. In this sense the righteous man can often say with David, “O’ how I love Thy law. It is my meditation all the day (Psa. 119:97) “How sweet are your words to my taste. Sweeter than honey to my mouth.”

10. Piper once said, “Never reduce Christianity to a system of demands, resolutions, and willpower. It has to do with what we delight in, Not just what we grit our teeth to accomplish” (John Piper sermon on Psalm 1).

11. The difference between the righteous and the wicked is the difference between two alternative worldviews. Thirdly, the psalmist offers us...

III. Two Contrasting Descriptions:

Read v. 3

1. The first description is that of a beautiful, healthy, fruit-bearing tree. This is what the blessed/righteous man will be like. The word of “planted” means Transplanted. It is a picture of what happens to one who repents of their godlessness and places all their hope in Christ. God uproots him from the dry, parched, lifeless ground where he has been living and transplants him to a new place.

³ Charles, Spurgeon, *The Truly Blessed Man*, (Vol. 55, Sermon NO. 3270), <https://www.spurgeongems.org/vols55-57/vols55-57.htm>, last visited on July 29, 2017

2. The word for “streams” means “Artificial channels” or “water courses,” or “canals.” It’s the picture of a farmer taking a dying fruit tree and transplanting it in the fertile ground between two water channels to make sure it is abundantly provided all the nutrients it needs to grow great and strong so that it can bear much fruit.

3. And it works! Every tree that God plants bears fruit. Why? Because it has the very life of the Spirit of God flowing through its roots and branches.

4. What kind of fruit does this tree bear? All kinds of godliness. It bears the fruit of the Spirit (Love joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control” (Gal. 5:22). It also bears humility, honesty, purity, integrity, truthfulness, worship, generosity, perseverance, compassion, and sacrificial service. This is what meditation of God’s word will do to you. It will change you. It will make you more and more like Jesus.

5. No wonder the psalmist concludes that, “In all that he does he prospers.” This was the same promise the Lord gave to Joshua (Josh. 1:8-9)

This Book of the Law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do according to all that is written in it. For then you will make your way prosperous, and then you will have good success. ⁹ Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous. Do not be frightened, and do not be dismayed, for the LORD your God is with you wherever you go.”

6. Those who meditate on God’s word in order to bring it to bear on the practical questions of life are men and women who are especially blessed of the Lord. That doesn’t mean that God will make you rich and guarantee that promotion. But it does mean that you will be successful in everything God wants you to do.

- Successfully battle temptation
- Successfully beat a stubborn habit
- Successfully find a way to give to the needs of others
- Successfully offer real wisdom to one who needs counsel.
- Successfully share the gospel with that lost friend or relative.
- Successfully love your spouse as Christ loves the church
- In whatever you do, you will prosper.

7. The wicked, however, are not like the blessed.

Read v. 4

8. The Hebrew text reads, “No so the wicked.” Far from being like a tree that is transplanted between streams of water, the godless wicked are like chaff that the wind blows away.

9. Chaff is the part of the wheat plant that is good for nothing. It is the rootless, weightless, worthless husk of the plant. It doesn’t take much to disperse it. It simply gets carried away by the wind to no place in particular.

10. The important thing to see here is that in the eyes of God the righteous person bears fruit for God because it is healthy and strong. The godless, however, are useless to God. The contrast could hardly be more stark.

11. So far we have seen

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IV. Two Different Destinies

Read verse 5.

1. In the final judgment the wicked will not stand. The picture here is that of a lawbreaker coming before a righteous judge where a final legal decision will be made and his case will be settled. On that day the wicked will not stand. That is, they will not be numbered among the congregation of the righteous whose sins have been forgiven and who have been reconciled to the God they pretended did not exist. Rather, they will be pronounced guilty and sentenced accordingly.

Read v. 6

2. The word for “knows” here means more than just “being aware.” Rather it refers to God’s intimate knowledge, care, and love for the righteous whose sins have been forgiven.

3. On that day, Jesus says, the Lord will come as King of kings, and he will separate the people as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. And he will say to his sheep, “Come, you who are blessed of my Father, enter the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.” But to the goats he will say, “Depart from me you cursed ones into everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels.”

4. So you see, while the Bible is a rather large book with many pages and many words, it is really quite simple. There are two kinds of people in the world: Those who have been forgiven of their sins, who love God and delight in His word, and those who delight in their sins, pretend that God is not there and despise His word.

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5. The good news, however, is that if you find yourself in the company of the wicked this morning and it frightens you and breaks your heart, God is willing to pull your life up by the roots and transplant you into a brand-new kind of life. You can become like a tree firmly planted by streams of water which yields its fruit in its season, and its leaf does not wither, and in all that he does he prospers. But you must come to Jesus on His terms. By faith you must be willing to admit that all you have to offer Him is your sin. Ask Him to forgive your unbelief and sin, and to change your heart in such a way that causes you to love Him and desire to obey Him.

6. There are only two ways to live, and there are only two final destinies. The counsel of Jesus Christ to you is this (Mat. 7:13–14)

Enter by the narrow gate. For the gate is wide and the way is easy that leads to destruction, and those who enter by it are many. For the gate is narrow and the way is hard that leads to life, and those who find it are few.

There are only two ways to live. Which way do you choose? <https://www.spurgeongems.org/vols55-57/vols55-57.htm>