

A Great Contrast

Introduction. All of us, at one time or another, experience a burn out. We do the same actions day in and day out, week in and week out. Our life becomes a grind. We look at our peers and see how exciting and enjoyable their life is and think, “Why can’t I enjoy a life like that.” It is precisely at these moments of weakness that Satan enters and tries to tempt us to follow him.

Compromise slowly leads us down a road to destruction, like an enormous tree that has stood for hundreds of years, decaying unnoticed for years, suddenly falls. One rationalization leads to another which in turn triggers a series of events more damaging than the first. Psalm 1 deals with this very problem. It divided into two distinct parts — the value of the godly life (vv. 1-3) and the results of the ungodly life (vv. 4-6).

I. The Value Of The Godly Life

- A. Our English word “blessed” means “happiness,” a joy and gratitude, as man may live in fellowship with his God. This condition of “bliss” is not merely a feeling. Even when the righteous do not feel happy, they are still considered “blessed” from God’s perspective
- B. The cause of this abundance of happiness is the uncompromising purity of a righteous walk with God. We can see this by analyzing the three categories of remaining terms in this verse:
 - 1. Walks-counsel-ungodly.
 - 2. Stands-path-sinners.
 - 3. Sits-seat-scornful.
- C. What the psalmist had in mind was the spiritual erosion of the mind. These word pictures give us an idea of just how easy it is for us to moved from righteousness to slow to a standstill or a complete stop as we are worn away by the company we choose to keep.
- D. “Walk” is a term that suggests “passing by” or “a casual movement along the way.”
 - 1. The entire phrase indicates one who does not imitate or “go through the casual motions” of wickedness.
 - 2. Verse 1 might be reworded as, “Oh, the happiness of the one who does not casually go through the motions, or imitates the plan of life of those who live in ungodliness, i.e. those who are willfully and persistently evil.”
- E. “Stand” has the idea of coming and taking one’s stand. It comes from the word meaning “a marked-out path, a certain and precise way of life.” Notice the definite contrast between the two lifestyles:
 - 1. The casual passerby slows down and before he knows it, he takes his stand.
 - 2. “Sinners” are those who miss the mark of God’s standards but do not care.
- F. “Sit” suggests a permanent settling down, dwelling, or abiding,.
 - 1. It is made even clearer by the use of “seat,” meaning “habitation” or “permanent residence.”
 - 2. The way of life is not in the sphere of the scornful — the one who continually makes light of what is sacred; the blasphemous one.

- a) We will be happy many times over if we maintain a pure walk, free from the slightest flirtation with evil.
 - b) If we begin to walk in the counsel of the wicked it is easy to slip slowly into the habitation of the scornful.
- G. Lot is a good example of this principle.
- 1. He walked in the way of the ungodly (Genesis 13:11-13).
 - 2. He “came and took his stand among sinners” (Genesis 19:1).
 - 3. He now lived among them in the “seat of the scornful” (Genesis 19:2-5).
- H. “But his delight is in ...”
- 1. This verse begins with a word of contrast. While the first verse was negative, this is positive. In contrast to compromise and erosion, the godly believer occupies himself with God’s word (Psalm 119:9).
 - 2. In order to stay in the path of godly living, we need an absolute standard that is clear in direction.
 - a) The psalmist claims that the godly person “delights” in the Lord’s word. He does not look on the word as irksome or a burden. Instead, day and night he studies, memorizes, and meditates on it. His mind is controlled by the word of God. This was his delight (Psalm 119:18, 97, 104-105, 130).
 - b) Meditation is to the soul what digestion is to the body. It means understanding the word, “chewing on it,” and applying it by making it become a part of the inner person (Jeremiah 15:16; cp. Deuteronomy 6:7-9; 1 Timothy 4:13, 15; 2 Timothy 2:15). It is thoughtful deliberation and intense focus.
- I. “Like a tree planted by the water ...”
- 1. Verse 1 gives us the promise of happiness, v. 2 provides the means for experiencing it, and now v. 3 declares the end result.
 - 2. Without any fanfare, yet as surely as the rising sun, we will become tree-like (cp. Numbers 24:6; Matthew 13:32).
 - a) Notice the four tree-like characteristics of a godly life:
 - (1) Planted — fortified, stable, rooted, solid, and strong (Psalm 92:12-14).
 - (2) Fruitful — productive, naturally follows being planted (John 15:1-8, 16).
 - (3) Unwithered — even during days of difficulty, the tree-like soul is untouched, undaunted (James 1:2-4).
 - (4) Prosperous — God blesses him in every way (John 10:10; 3 John 2).
 - b) When Jeremiah condemned Judah for seeking the help of Egypt, he used words similar to the psalmist (Jeremiah 17:5-8).

II. The Results Of The Ungodly Life

- A. The first fact we observe about these three verses is contrast. There is a completely opposite effect from the previous verses, highlighted by the phrase, “The wicked are not so.”
- B. This refers back to the three preceding verses describing the righteous individual who is happy many times over, who delights and meditates in the word, and who is like a fruitful and prosperous tree.
- C. Instead the psalmist uses the term “chaff” that portrays the life of the ungodly.

1. It is the outer part of a grain seeds which separates at the time of threshing; the husks and refuse which fall and blow away.
 2. The Hebrew word for “drives away” is the word which means “to drive asunder, disseminate, diffuse, strike, or beat” (Hosea 13:3).
 3. John the Baptist used a similar picture in Matthew 3:10-12 when he described God as a harvester, visiting the threshing floor, separating the grain from the chaff and then burning the chaff.
- D. “The wicked will not stand in the judgment.”
1. On account of their inner worthlessness and instability, the wicked will not stand before God in the judgment.
 2. A parallel statement then follows: “Nor sinners in the assembly of the righteous.”
 - a) They are judged by being alienated from the congregation of the righteous, i.e. those who have a relationship with God and enjoy His presence — both now and in eternity.
 - b) The Lord does the judging. He alone, not man, is capable of judging man’s status before Him (2 Timothy 2:19).
- E. The psalm concludes with the severe reminder that the way of the unrighteous will perish.
1. Instead of prospering, the ungodly will ultimately perish. Verses 5-6 is one of the few allusions to the final judgment in the Old Testament.
 - a) It is not until the New Testament is revealed that we are given a fuller explanation of the events of the end.
 - b) However, the psalmist clearly recognized that all men must stand before God in judgment (cp. Matthew 25:31-46; John 5:28-29; Romans 14:12; 2 Corinthians 5:10).
 2. There is not the slightest similarity between the spiritually accelerating life of the righteous and the slowly eroding life of the wicked (1 John 3:6-10).

Conclusion. Let me encourage you today to maintain a pure, uncompromising walk with God. Delight yourself in His word, and you will grow into a stable, reliable “spiritual tree.” There is no shortcut to spiritual growth. Like a tree, our growth occurs slowly and deliberately, depending on the food and proper surroundings.