

□ 16. CONTRASTING THE ONLY TWO PATHS

“Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor stands in the path of sinners, nor sits in the seat of the scornful; but his delight is in the law of Yahweh, and in His law he meditates day and night. He shall be like a tree planted by the rivers of water, that brings forth its fruit in its season, whose leaf also shall not wither; and whatever he does shall prosper. The ungodly are not so, but are like the chaff which the wind drives away. Therefore the ungodly shall not stand in the judgment, nor sinners in the congregation of the righteous. For Yahweh knows the way of the righteous, but the way of the ungodly shall perish” (Psalms 1:1-6).



Introduction

The majority of people will acknowledge that there are only two paths: the path of godliness and the path of ungodliness. Some people describe themselves as “sitting on the fence” as though they haven’t chosen either of these two paths. This, though, is a delusion... one is either walking the path of righteousness or the path of unrighteousness.

While we may remain in a pure state from our birth for a time (Deuteronomy 1:39; Ecclesiastes 7:29; Isaiah 7:16; Matthew 18:3), we inevitably reach an age where we must choose a path to walk, and we all choose the path of unrighteousness (Psalms 14:3; Romans 3:23). Some people think they will get a second chance after death (see Hebrews 9:27), but, actually, God gives us that second chance while we yet live, in that, He calls us by the gospel to repent and walk the path of righteousness (2 Thessalonians 2:13-14). When you think about it, every day is a “second chance”.

One way of ensuring we are walking along the right path is to read and study the contrast between the righteous and the wicked as set forth in the first Psalm.

1. Characteristics of a righteous man (Psalms 1:1-3).

- A righteous man does not walk in the counsel of the ungodly (Romans 12:2). Rather, the godly man is guided by the counsel of God (Psalms 73:24).
- A righteous man does not stand in the path of sinners, i.e., deliberately putting himself in a position to encounter them (Proverbs 4:14-15). Rather, the godly man trusts in the Lord to show him the path of life (Psalms 16:11; 27:11; 119:105).
- A righteous man does not sit in the seat of scoffers (Psalms 26:4-5; Jeremiah 15:17; 2 Corinthians 6:14), i.e., one without reason and sense (Proverbs 18:2) who takes delight in foolishness (Proverbs 10:23; cp. Isaiah 66:3); he mocks and disdains all that is good; he is a low base fellow. Rather, the godly man seeks out the wise (Proverbs 13:20) and rejoices in the assembly of the saints (Psalms 119:63; 149:1).
- A righteous man delights in the law of God (Psalms 40:8; 119:16, 24, 47, 70, 77, 174; Romans 7:22) and meditates upon it (Psalms 119:148).
- A righteous man is like a tree firmly planted by streams of water. This is a picture of one truly blessed by God.

2. Characteristics of a wicked man (Psalms 1:4-5).

- The wicked man is the one who has given himself over to the world, in that, he permanently follows ungodly counsel, dwells in the paths of sinners, and scoffs at all that is good.
- The wicked man delights in sin and approves and applauds others who live in sin (Romans 1:32). Indeed, sin is a sport for the wicked (Proverbs 10:23; 14:9). God is in none of his thoughts (Psalms 10:4).
- A wicked man is as worthless as chaff (Proverbs 10:20) and only fit to be driven away; they shall not stand in the judgment, i.e., they will by no means be acquitted, but shall suffer condemnation (Proverbs 11:23).

3. The Lord knows those that are His (Psalms 1:6).

- The Lord knows or approves of the way or lifestyle of the righteous man (cp. 2 Timothy 2:19): he strives to keep his thoughts (Proverbs 12:5; 2 Corinthians 10:5) and speech pure (Colossians 4:6; Ecclesiastes 10:12), and he walks in love toward God (2 John 1:6) and man (Ephesians 5:2). This man is blessed in all his ways.
- The Lord disapproves of the way of the wicked; they are children of disobedience and the wrath of God abides on them (Colossians 3:5-6; Ephesians 2:1-3). Thus they shall perish (Psalms 125:5; Proverbs 28:18).

Summary

- ☞ A righteous person knows that “evil company corrupts good habits” (1 Corinthians 15:33) and will not allow himself to be conformed to the principles of this world (Romans 12:1-2). A righteous person delights in the word of God and pursues holiness (Hebrews 12:14). Such a man is approved by the Lord and all his ways are blessed; and all that he does prospers (Psalms 128:1; Proverbs 16:7).
- ☞ There is nothing said about the character of the wicked, but we know he is among the sinners who live according to evil counsel and scorn and disdain all that is good. Indeed the wicked seeks to destroy the righteous (Psalms 37:32).
- ☞ The righteous and the wicked walk two different paths and, unlike some who think they lead to the same place, they each lead to their own destination. The Lord blesses the path of the righteous and, ultimately, it leads to eternal life. The wicked are as chaff – worthless! Such worthless people shall only find death.

“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. Because narrow is the gate and difficult is the way which leads to life, and there are few who find it” (Matthew 7:13-14).

Applications

- ☞ We are warned “Do not be deceived: evil company corrupts good habits” (1 Corinthians 15:33). Do we believe it? You will agree that our actions are a more accurate measure of our beliefs than our words. How is it then that many will – where they have a choice – avoid evil companions and society, and yet keep company with evil companions via their television sets (Psalms 101:3)?
- ☞ This Psalm contrasts the godly man and the ungodly man. Godliness must be pursued (1 Timothy 6:11). Are you able to define *godliness*? If not, then you can hardly claim to be pursuing it! Since we are commanded to pursue godliness, then it is essential to learn what it means. This is also true of other things we are commanded to pursue (see Romans 14:19; 1 Corinthians 14:1; 1 Thessalonians 5:15; 1 Timothy 6:11; 2 Timothy 2:22; Hebrews 12:14).
- ☞ What is our attitude toward God’s word? The blessed man has no delight in evil companions, but, rather, “his *delight* is in the law of Yahweh” (cp. Psalms 112:1; 119:47, 92; Romans 7:22) and “the joy and rejoicing of my heart” (Jeremiah 15:16). The word of God is that for which we ought to “crave” (1 Peter 2:2 NIV). How we feel about reading and studying the scriptures is a clue to our spiritual state. Whether we do or do not read and study the scriptures is the proof of our attitude.