

What's The Difference?

Psalm One

Imagine that I have here beside me two men. They live in the same small town in Mississippi. Both have similar types of work. Both of them love their families, enjoy football, and pay taxes. Both of these men have moods that they go through, and both face temptations every day. Both of them will one day die. But they are not the same. There is a big difference between the two. One of them is a Christian, the other is not.

You will notice that the Book of Psalms is in the center of the Bible. The word “psalm” means “song,” so we could call this beautiful collection of psalms “the hymn book of the Old Testament.” Every one of the 150 psalms was put to music and sung in either private or public worship. There is such a wide range of emotion represented here that regardless of what you are facing or feeling, you can find a psalm to express the depths of your heart.

This first psalm has been called “The Gateway to the Psalms,” and in this song the singer depicted two very different ways of life. Right from the start, the singer makes a distinction between the righteous man and the unrighteous man. What's the difference? Psalm One holds the lives of two men side by side, and compares them, and we can see a sharp contrast between the two. One easy way to see this contrast is by looking at the first and last words of this psalm: “blessed” and “perish.”

The word “blessed” means literally “O how happy!” and comes from a root word which refers to a straight path, in the sense of being so successful that you go straight to prosperity. But in sharp contrast the word “perish” literally refers to a road which goes nowhere.

First, let's understand that when we say “righteous” we're not talking about a stuffed-shirt, holier-than-thou Pharisee. We're talking about a sinner who has been to the Cross, and whose righteousness depends on the fact that he has been redeemed by the blood of Christ. He has been made righteous in Christ.

What is it about the person in Christ that allows him or her to be different from everyone else, to hold his head high when things are dark? What is it that enables that kind of a person to keep on going when it appears that all hope is lost? What are the ways in which they are different?

1 **The righteous person has a different lifestyle, v. 1**
“*Blessed is the man who does not walk in the counsel of the wicked.*” The word “walk” here refers to the way a person lives, his lifestyle. Verse one tells us three things about the lifestyle of the righteous person. ***First, he has a unique direction to his life.*** He knows the direction of his life, because he knows the Lord of his life.

He is a happy man who never allows his course of life to be dictated by those who take no thought of God. She does not participate in the projects or the designs of the wicked. That unique direction of the man or woman of God is determined by the lifestyle that becomes his as he surrenders to Christ.

He finds that he must say “no” to many things. The true man of God must, if he is to remain faithful to Christ, again and again resist public opinion, and reject some of the trends and fashions of his time. The lifestyle that he has as a follower of Christ demands that he is just a little different from the rest of the crowd.

It may mean that a Christian young person dares to say no to the challenge to take that first drink of alcohol or to use drugs. It may mean that an adult dares to take a stand for Christ on his or her job. It may mean that Christians of all ages dare to follow Christ to be Lord of their recreational life as well as other areas of that life. The man or woman of God seeks the approval of God.

He does not get his slant on life from those whose lives are slanted away from God. She does not order her life on the counsel of those whose lives are out of order. He has a unique direction to his life: he knows where he’s going, and he knows how to get there.

Second, the lifestyle of a righteous person follows the example of Christ. Verse one also tells us that that man is blessed who does not “*stand in the way of sinners.*” To “stand with sinners” means to be influenced by their lifestyle. A

person tends to adopt the ways of people he spends time with. If you spend time with sinners, if you spend time with those whose lives are filled with open and blatant sin, your life will soon begin to exhibit those same sins.

But if you spend time with Christ and with other Christians, your life will begin to exhibit the kinds of qualities that Christ desires to find in every one of His followers. One of the biggest problems of Christians today is that we allow things and people of this world to become our examples for proper behavior. We fill our minds and our time with things that pull us away from what God desires for us, and then we wonder why we have no power in our lives. We wonder why other people don't notice something different about our lives as Christians.

The remainder of the first verse tells us a *third* thing about the lifestyle of the true follower of Christ: ***he chooses to be sensitive to the Spirit of God.*** Blessed is the man who does not “*sit in the seat of mockers.*” Rather than listening to and taking part in the counsel and activities of the sinners and scoffers of God, the righteous person does not adopt the way of life of those who hold God in open contempt. He remains sensitive to the yearnings of the Spirit.

Paul wrote in Galatians, “*So I say, live by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the sinful nature*” (Galatians 5:16). When a person is truly living by the Spirit of God, he or she won't gratify the desires of the flesh, but will continue to be sensitive to what God's Spirit is teaching and leading him to do or be. Remaining sensitive to the Spirit of God, he discovers that his lifestyle is affected. The things he does, the things he says or thinks—all those are affected because the righteous person is spiritually sensitive to God's Holy Spirit.

2 The righteous person has a different counsel, v. 2
Verse two tells us what that counsel is that is so different from the counsel of the wicked, the counsel of those who are outside God's Kingdom: “*But his delight is in the law of the Lord...*” ***He allows God's Word to give him true joy.*** He finds no pleasure in the advice of the wicked. He finds no pleasure in doing the things that the world does for pleasure. His delight is in the Law of the Lord.

What does that mean? That doesn't mean that he sits and reads the Bible all day long, but what it does mean is that the Word of God becomes dear to him. He finds his advice for living in the pages of the Bible.

He realizes that other books and other sources of advice may inform his mind, may entertain him, may delight him, but only the Word of God contains the authoritative revelation of the mind and will of God. Only in the Bible can we find mercy, forgiveness, joy, grace and strength.

The Christian realizes that the Word of God is a strong staff to the weary pilgrim. He knows that the Bible is sweet rest to those who stumble beneath heavy burdens, a safe guide to those who have lost their way. The Word of God is healing strength and forgiveness to those who are weighed down with guilt and sin. It is a glad message of hope to those who are distressed or discouraged. It reveals the Savior of the world to those who search for salvation. The Word of God is there to help you when you are in sorrow, when others fail you, when you have sinned. The Christian can find comfort in the pages of God's Word when he is worried, when he has the blues, when he is lonely or fearful.

The righteous person has a different counsel, and he allows God's Word to give him true joy. He knows what the psalmist spoke of when he said, "*The law from your mouth is more precious to me than thousands of pieces of silver and gold*" (Psalm 119:72).

What is **your** delight? Whatever delights you, controls you. Are you delighted by God's Word—are you delighted by God Himself? Or are you delighted by the things not of God?

And as we read further, we notice that the righteous person allows God's Word **to saturate his life**. The psalmist said at the end of verse two, "*On his law he meditates day and night.*" You see, the person who follows after God considers the Word of God relevant to all he does. He realizes that whatever shapes a man's thinking, shapes his life, and he wants and yearns for his life to be shaped by the Word of God. The Counsel of God becomes so much a part of his life that he is alert for God's guidance in the rush of the day and in the silence of the night.

He also allows God's Word *to guide his life*. He applies its teachings and its concepts to his life. James 1:22 reads, "*Be doers of the word and not hearers only.*" We have so many hearers, but the number of doers is woefully small. Psalm 119:105 reads, "*Thy Word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path.*" The righteous person finds guidance from God's Word for each step of the way.

So that is the second thing that is different about the life of a person who is righteous: he has a different counsel. He gets his advice from the pages of God's Word, and he allows God's Word to give him true joy, to saturate his life, and to guide his life.

3 The righteous person has a different purpose, v. 3

Look at verse three. "*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.*" The life of the righteous is securely anchored and fruitful in God's service. He doesn't exist merely to serve himself, but he lives to serve God and others.

Pay attention to how this all flows together. When I find my delight in and meditate on the Word, I discover that I have in my life the kind of peace we read about in verse three. A tree planted by streams of water is a peaceful scene. That tree is always fruitful at the right times.

Also pay attention to that word "planted." That word tells us that that tree was placed there *on purpose*. Someone lovingly and with great care planted that tree when it was only a sapling. The spot was chosen with care, a place where the tree could grow and thrive.

But bring this home: we have been planted! If you qualify according to the Scripture as a righteous person, you have been planted, and you're here on purpose! Jesus lovingly and with much care has chosen the spot where I am to grow and blossom. I will grow and I will blossom, because I am planted by Jesus, from Whom flow those rivers of living water. We can have the stability that comes from following after God. We can have the peace and assurance that comes from knowing that we are where God wants us. We have been put here on purpose!

The wicked are not so, says verse four, but “*are like chaff that the wind blows away.*” This is a picture of a threshing floor, where the thresher tossed the crushed sheaves of grain into the air with a winnowing fork, and while in the air, the lighter chaff was separated from the heavier grain. The grain is useless until the chaff is removed, but once that process is completed, the grain can be used for food, while the chaff is gathered into piles and is burned.

Chaff is used throughout Scripture as an emblem of what is weak and useless. Now there are many people who have not known Christ whose lives have benefitted mankind, Christians included. But the bottom line of eternity is not going to be what they’ve done to help mankind, but whether they’ve accepted or rejected Jesus Christ as Lord of their lives.

What does your life look like? Can it be compared to a tree planted by streams of water, or is it like the chaff which the wind drives away, worthless in God’s service?

4 **The righteous person has a different destiny, vv. 5-6**
“Therefore the wicked will not stand in the judgment, nor sinners in the assembly of the righteous. For the Lord knows the way of the righteous, but the way of the wicked will perish.” The ungodly man will be alone in the Day of Judgment. His life is rootless, meaningless, worthless in the service of God now, and it will be then, as well. He will have nothing to support him in the Day of Judgment. As we’ve already pointed out, that word for “perish” in verse six means “to build a road which goes nowhere.”

That is the destiny of the ungodly. The roads of the wicked and the righteous may for a time seem to travel together. As Charles Spurgeon once wrote, “God's precious diamonds still lie in the same field with pebbles.” The ungodly person may even be a member of a church, but the difference will eventually show up. Somewhere there has been or will be a parting of the ways. And anything not yet separated will be separated when the Day of Judgment comes.

Jesus said: “*When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, he will sit on his throne in heavenly glory. All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate the people one from another as a shepherd separates the*

sheep from the goats. He will put the sheep on his right and the goats on his left” (Matthew 25:31-33).

What is the destiny of the righteous? God knows the lifestyle and the heart of the righteous person, and takes a loving interest in his destiny. Verse six reminds us “*For the Lord watches over the way of the righteous.*” This means that God knows us intimately. Jesus said in John 10:14, “*I am the good shepherd; I know my sheep and my sheep know me.*” What a wonderful, blessed thing it is to realize that the Lord knows the way of the righteous! To think that each step of my way is known and is carefully guarded by my Savior is a great and inspiring thought! No matter how dark the path may grow, no matter who misunderstands me, my Lord knows, and He understands. In that one phrase of the sixth verse there is life, and there is peace.

Wherever I go, the Lord knows my way. He is the One who carefully and lovingly prepared the path for my life, and I, when I surrendered to Christ and accepted Him as my Lord so that He could save me, decided to follow that path. To know, each step of the way, that God prepared that way, and that He constantly and continuously watches over my path, is enough for me! It is enough, for “I am His, and He is mine”!

And I know that my destiny is prepared for me as well. I know that I have an eternal home in heaven with my Lord Jesus Christ. I am different because I have a different destiny than that of the ungodly.

When we began this message we looked at two men who are alike in many respects. But there is a difference: one is a Christian, and one is not. We’ve seen from Psalm One what is so different about the Christian. So one day you might encounter someone who says to you, “**I am as good as you. What makes you so different?**” You can open your Bible to Psalm One, and show him:

- 1. You have a different lifestyle, v. 1**
- 2. You have a different counsel, v. 2**
- 3. You have a different purpose in life, vv. 3-4**
- 4. You have a different destiny, vv. 5-6**

No doubt you've been examining your life in the light of the Scripture. What do you see? After you've compared your life to the Word of God, *is there a difference?*