

Adam Clarke:

Introduction

The blessedness of the righteous shown, in his avoiding every appearance of evil, Psalm 1:1. In his godly use of the law of the Lord, Psalm 1:2 This farther pointed out under the metaphor of a good tree planted in a good well-watered soil, Psalm 1:3. The opposite state of the ungodly pointed out, under the metaphor of chaff driven away by the wind, Psalm 1:4. The miserableness of sinners, and the final happiness of the godly, Psalm 1:5, Psalm 1:6.

Verse 1

Blessed is the man - This Psalm has no title, and has been generally considered, but without especial reason, as a preface or introduction to the whole book.

The word אֲשֵׁרִים (ashrey), which we translate blessed, is properly in the plural form, blessednesses, or may be considered as an exclamation produced by contemplating the state of the man who has taken God for his portion; O the blessedness of the man! And the word הַאִישׁ (haish), is emphatic: That man; that one among a thousand who lives for the accomplishment of the end for which God created him.

1. God made man for happiness.
2. Every man feels a desire to be happy.
3. All human beings abhor misery.
4. Happiness is the grand object of pursuit among all men.
5. But so perverted is the human heart, that it seeks happiness where it cannot be found; and in things which are naturally and morally unfit to communicate it.
6. The true way of obtaining it is here laid down.

That walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly - There is a double Climax in this verse, which it will be proper to note: -

There are here three characters, each exceeding the other in sinfulness.

1. The Ungodly, רְשָׁעִים (reshaim) from רָשָׁע (rasha), to be unjust; rendering to none his due; withholding from God, society, and himself, what belongs to each. Ungodly - he who has not God in him; who is without God in the world.
2. Sinners, חַטָּאִים (chattaim), from חָטָא (chata), אֶתְּ מִן הַמַּקְוֶה, אֶתְּ מִן הַמַּקְוֶה, אֶתְּ מִן הַמַּקְוֶה, to miss the mark, אֶתְּ מִן הַמַּקְוֶה, אֶתְּ מִן הַמַּקְוֶה, to pass over the prohibited limits, אֶתְּ מִן הַמַּקְוֶה, אֶתְּ מִן הַמַּקְוֶה, to transgress. This man not only does no good, but he does evil. The former was without God, but not desperately wicked. The latter adds outward transgression to the sinfulness of his heart.
3. Scornful, לְצַחֵם (letsim), from לָצַח (latsah), אֶתְּ מִן הַמַּקְוֶה, אֶתְּ מִן הַמַּקְוֶה, to mock, deride. He who has no religion; lives in the open breach of God's laws, and turns revelation, the immortality of the soul, and the existence of an invisible world into ridicule. He is at least a deist, and endeavours to dissolve, as Much as he can, the bonds of moral obligation in civil society. As the sinner exceeds the ungodly, so the scornful exceeds both.

The second climax is found in the words,

1. Walk
2. Stand
3. Sit

Which mark three different degrees of evil in the conduct of those persons.

Observe,

1. The ungodly man - one uninfluenced by God.
2. The sinner - he who adds to ungodliness transgression
3. The scornful - the deist, atheist, etc., who make a mock of every thing sacred.

The Ungodly man walks, the Sinner stands, and the Scornful man sits down in the way of iniquity. Mark certain circumstances of their differing characters and conduct.

1. The ungodly man has his counsel;
2. The sinner has his way; and,
3. The scorner has his seat.

The ungodly man is unconcerned about religion; he is neither zealous for his own salvation, nor for that of others: and he counsels and advises those with whom he converses to adopt his plan, and not trouble themselves about praying, reading, repenting, etc., etc. there is no need for such things; live an honest life, make no fuss about religion, and you will fare well enough at last. Now, "blessed is the man who walks not in this man's counsel; who does not come into his measures, nor act according to his plan.

The sinner has his particular way of transgressing; one is a drunkard, another dishonest, another unclean. Few are given to every species of vice. There are many covetous men who abhor drunkenness; many drunkards who abhor covetousness; and so of others. Each has his easily besetting sin; therefore, says the prophet, let the wicked forsake His Way. Now, blessed is he who stands not in such a man's Way.

The scorner has brought, in reference to himself, all religion and moral feeling to an end. He has sat down - is utterly confirmed in impiety, and makes a mock at sin. His conscience is seared; and he is a believer in all unbelief. Now, blessed is the man who sits not down in his Seat.

See the correspondent relations in this account.

1. He who walks according to the counsel of the ungodly will soon,
2. Stand to look on the way of sinners; and thus, being off his guard, he will soon be a partaker in their evil deeds.
3. He who has abandoned himself to transgression will, in all probability, soon become hardened by the deceitfulness of sin; and sit down with the scorner, and endeavor to turn religion into ridicule.

The last correspondency we find is: -

1. The seat answers to the sitting of the scornful.
2. The way answers to the standing of the sinner; and
3. The counsel answers to the walking of the ungodly.

The great lesson to be learned from the whole is, sin is progressive; one evil propensity or act leads to another. He who acts by bad counsel may soon do evil deeds; and he who abandons himself to evil doings may end his life in total apostasy from God. "When lust has conceived, it brings forth sin; and when sin is finished, it brings forth death." Solomon the son of David, adds a profitable advice to those words of his father: "Enter not into the path of the wicked, and go not in the way of evil men; avoid it, pass not by it, turn from it, and pass away;" Proverbs 4:14, Proverbs 4:15.

As the blessedness of the man is great who avoids the ways and the workers of iniquity, so his wretchedness is great who acts on the contrary: to him we must reverse the words of David: "Cursed is the man who walketh in the counsel of the ungodly; who standeth in the way of sinners; and who sitteth in the seat of the scornful." Let him that readeth understand.

Verse 2

But his delight is in the law of the Lord - *שׂוֹכֵן בְּחֻקֵי יְהוָה* (shephetsu), his will, desire, affection, every motive in his heart, and every moving principle in his soul, are on the side of God and his truth. He takes up the law of the Lord as the rule of his life; he brings all his actions and affections to this holy standard. He looketh into the perfect law of liberty; and is not a forgetful hearer, but a doer of the word; and is therefore blessed in his deed. He not only reads to gain knowledge from the Divine oracles, but he meditates on what he has read, feeds on it; and thus receiving the sincere milk of the word, he grows thereby unto eternal life. This is not an occasional study to him; it is his work day and night. As his heart is in it, the employment must be frequent, and the disposition to it perpetual.

Verse 3

Like a tree planted - Not like one growing wild, however strong or luxuriant it may appear; but one that has been carefully cultivated, and for the proper growth of which all the advantages of soil and situation have been chosen. If a child be brought up in the discipline and admonition of the Lord, we have both reason and revelation to encourage us to expect a godly and useful life. Where religious education is neglected, alas! what fruits of righteousness can be expected? An uncultivated soul is like an uncultivated field, all overgrown with briars, thorns, and thistles.

By the rivers of water - *אֲרָבִיּוֹת מַיִם* *אַרְבַּע מַיִם* (palgey mayim), the streams or divisions of the waters. Alluding to the custom of irrigation in the eastern countries, where streams are conducted from a canal or river to different parts of the ground, and turned off or on at pleasure; the person having no more to do than by his foot to turn a sod from the side of one stream, to cause it to share its waters with the other parts to which he wishes to direct his course. This is called "watering the land with the foot," Deuteronomy 11:10 (note), where see the note.

His fruit in his season - In such a case expectation is never disappointed. Fruit is expected, fruit is borne; and it comes also in the time in which it should come. A godly education, under the influences of the Divine Spirit, which can never be withheld where they are earnestly sought, is sure to produce the fruits of righteousness; and he who reads, prays, and meditates, will ever see the work which God has given him to do; the power by which he is to perform it; and the times, places and opportunities for doing those things by which God can obtain most glory, his own soul most good, and his neighbor most edification.

His leaf also shall not wither - His profession of true religion shall always be regular and unsullied; and his faith be ever shown by his works. As the leaves and the fruit are the evidences of the vegetative perfection of the tree; so a zealous religious profession, accompanied with good works, are the evidences of the soundness of faith in the Christian man. Rabbi Solomon Jarchi gives a curious turn to this expression: he considers the leaves as expressing those matters of the law that seem to be of no real use, to be quite unimportant, and that apparently neither add nor diminish. But even these things are parts of the Divine revelation, and all have their use, so even the apparently indifferent actions or sayings of a truly holy man have their use; and from the manner and spirit in which they are done or said, have the tendency to bear the observer to something great and good.

Whatsoever he doeth shall prosper - It is always healthy; it is extending its roots, increasing its woody fibres, circulating its nutritive juices, putting forth fruitbuds, blossoms, leaves, or fruit; and all these operations go on in a healthy tree, in their proper seasons. So the godly man; he is ever taking deeper root growing stronger in the grace he has already received, increasing in heavenly desires, and under the continual influence of the Divine Spirit, forming those purposes from which much fruit to the glory and praise of God shall be produced.

Verse 4

The ungodly are not so - The Vulgate and Septuagint, and the versions made from them, such as the Ethiopic and Arabic, double the last negation, and add a clause to the end of the verse, "Not so the ungodly, not so; they shall be like the dust which the wind scatters away from the face of the earth." There is nothing solid in the men; there is nothing good in their ways. They are not of God's planting; they are not good grain; they are only chaff, and a chaff that shall be separated from the good grain when the fan or shovel of God's power throws them up to the wind of his judgments. The manner of winnowing in the eastern countries is nearly the same with that practiced in various parts of these kingdoms before the invention of winnowing machines. They either throw it up in a place out of doors by a large wooden shovel against the wind; or with their weights or winnowing fans shake it down leisurely in the wind. The grain falls down nearly perpendicularly; and the chaff, through its lightness, is blown away to a distance from the grain.

An ungodly man is never steady; his purposes are abortive; his conversation light, trifling, and foolish; his professions, friendships, etc., frothy, hollow, and insincere; and both he and his works are carried away to destruction by the wind of God's judgments.

Verse 5

Therefore the ungodly shall not stand - This refers to the winnowing mentioned in the preceding verse. Some of the versions have, The ungodly shall not arise in the judgment - they shall have no resurrection, except to shame and everlasting contempt. But probably the meaning is, When they come to be judged, they shall be condemned. They shall have nothing to plead in their behalf. That the impious were never to have any resurrection, but be annihilated, was the opinion of several among the Jews, and of some among Christians. The former believe that only the true Israelites shall be raised again; and that the souls of all others, the Christians not excepted, die with their bodies. Such unfounded opinions are unworthy of refutation.

Verse 6

The Lord knoweth - יָדָעָה (yodea) approveth the way, יָדָעָה אֶת־דַּרְכֵי־צְדִיקִים (yodea et-darkei-tzaddikim), Coverdale, of the righteous, צְדִיקִים (tsaddikim), from יָדָעָה אֶת־צְדָקָה (yodea et-tzadakah), to give even weight; the men who give to all their due; opposed to יָדָעָה אֶת־דַּרְכֵי־רִשָּׁעִים (yodea et-darkei-rishaim), Psalm 1:1, they who withhold right from all; see above. Such holy men are under the continual eye of God's providence; he knows the way that they take; approves of their motives, purposes, and works, because they are all wrought through himself. He provides for them in all exigencies, and defends them both in body and soul.

The way of the ungodly shall perish - Their projects, designs and operations, shall perish; God's curse shall be on all that they have, do, and are. And in the day of judgment they shall be condemned to everlasting fire in the perdition of ungodly men. The wicked shall perish at the presence of the Lord. Reader take warning!