

PSALM 1

This is a psalm of instruction concerning good and evil, setting before us life and death, the blessing and the curse, that we may take the right way which leads to happiness and avoid that which will certainly end in our misery and ruin. The different character and condition of godly people and wicked people, those that serve God and those that serve him not, is here plainly stated in a few words; so that every man, if he will be faithful to himself, may here see his own face and then read his own doom. That division of the children of men into saints and sinners, righteous and unrighteous, the children of God and the children of the wicked one, as it is ancient, ever since the struggle began between sin and grace, the seed of the woman and the seed of the serpent, so it is lasting, and will survive all other divisions and subdivisions of men into high and low, rich and poor, bond and free; for by this men's everlasting state will be determined, and the distinction will last as long as heaven and hell. This psalm shows us,

- I.** The holiness and happiness of a godly man (v. 1-3).
- II.** The sinfulness and misery of a wicked man (v. 4, 5).
- III.** The ground and reason of both (v. 6). Whoever collected the psalms of David (probably it was Ezra) with good reason put this psalm first, as a preface to the rest, because it is absolutely necessary to the acceptance of our devotions that we be righteous before God (for it is only the prayer of the upright that is his delight), and therefore that we be right in our notions of blessedness and in our choice of the way that leads to it. Those are not fit to put up good prayers who do not walk in good ways.

PSALM 1:1-3

THE HAPPY MAN

The psalmist begins with the character and condition of a godly man, that those may first take the comfort of that to whom it belongs. Here is,

I. A description of the godly man's spirit and way, by which we are to try ourselves. The Lord knows those that are his by name, but we must know them by their character; for that is agreeable to a state of probation, that we may study to answer to the character, which is indeed both the command of the law which we are bound in duty to obey and the condition of the promise which we are bound in interest to fulfil. The character of a good man is here given by the rules he chooses to walk by and to take his measures from. What we take at our setting out, and at every turn, for the guide of our conversation, whether the course of this world or the word of God, is of material consequence. An error in the choice of our standard and leader is original and fatal; but, if we be right here, we are in a far fair way to do well.

1. A godly man, that he may avoid the evil, utterly renounces the companionship of evil-doers, and will not be led by them (v. 1): *He walks not in the council of the ungodly, etc.* This part of his character is put first, because those that will keep the commandments of their God must say to evil-doers, *Depart from us* (³⁸¹⁵Psalm 119:115), and departing from evil is that in which wisdom begins.

(1.) He sees evil-doers round about him; the world is full of them; they walk on every side. They are here described by three characters, *ungodly*, *sinner*, and *scornful*. See by what steps men arrive at the height of impiety. *Nemo repente fit turpissimus* — *None reach the height of vice at once.* They are *ungodly* first, casting off the fear of God and living in the neglect of their duty to him: but they rest not there. When the services of religion are laid aside, they come to be *sinner*, that is, they break out into open rebellion against God and engage in the service of sin and Satan. Omissions make way for commissions, and by these the heart is so hardened that at length they come to be *scorners*, that is, they openly defy all that is sacred, scoff at religion, and make a jest of sin. Thus is the way of iniquity down-hill; the bad grow worse, sinners themselves become tempters to others and advocates for Baal. The word which we translate *ungodly* signifies such as are unsettled, aim at no certain end and walk by no certain rule, but are at the command of every lust and at the beck of every temptation. The word for *sinner* signifies such as are determined for the practice of sin and set it up as their trade. The *scornful* are those that set *their mouths against the heavens*. These the good man sees with a sad heart; they are a constant vexation to his righteous soul. But,

(2.) He shuns them wherever he sees them. He does not do as they do; and, that he may not, he does not converse familiarly with them.

[1.] He does *not walk in the counsel of the ungodly*. He is not present at their councils, nor does he advise with them; though they are ever so witty, and subtle, and learned, if they are ungodly, they shall not be the men of his counsel. He does not consent to them, nor *say as they say*, ^{<4251>}Luke 23:51. He does not take his measures from their principles, nor act according to the advice which they give and take. The ungodly are forward to give their advice against religion, and it is managed so artfully that we have reason to think ourselves happy if we escape being tainted and ensnared by it.

[2.] He *stands not in the way of sinners*; he avoids doing as they do; their way shall not be his way; he will not come into it, much less will he continue in it, as the sinner does, who *sets himself in a way that is not good*, ^{<1264>}Psalms 36:4. He avoids (as much as may be) being where they are. That he may not imitate them, he will not associate with them, nor choose them for his companions. He does not stand in their way, to be picked up by them (^{<1008>}Proverbs 7:8), but keeps as far from them as from a place or person infected with the plague, for fear of the contagion, ^{<1014>}Proverbs 4:14, 15. He that would be kept from harm must keep out of harm's way.

[3.] He *sits not in the seat of the scornful*; he does not repose himself with those that sit down secure in their wickedness and please themselves with the searedness of their own consciences. He does not associate with those that sit in close cabal to find out ways and means for the support and advancement of the devil's kingdom, or that sit in open judgment, magisterially to condemn the generation of the righteous. The seat of the drunkards is the *seat of the scornful*, ^{<1492>}Psalms 69:12. Happy is the man that never sits in it, ^{<1005>}Hosea 7:5.

2. A godly man, that he may do that which is good and cleave to it, submits to the guidance of the word of God and makes that familiar to him, v. 2. This is that which keeps him out of the way of the ungodly and fortifies him against their temptations. *By the words of thy lips I have kept me from the path of the deceiver*, ^{<1704>}Psalms 17:4. We need not court the fellowship of sinners, either for pleasure or for improvement, while we have fellowship with the word of God and with God himself in and by his word. *When thou awakest it shall talk with thee*, ^{<1022>}Proverbs 6:22. We

may judge of our spiritual state by asking, “What is the law of God to us? What account do we make of it? What place has it in us?” See here,

(1.) The entire affection which a good man has for the law of God: *His delight is in it*. He delights in it, though it be a law, a yoke, because it is the law of God, which is holy, just, and good, which he freely consents to, and so delights in, *after the inner man*, ^{<876>}Romans 7:16, 22. All who are well pleased that there is a God must be well pleased that there is a Bible, a revelation of God, of his will, and of the only way to happiness in him.

(2.) The intimate acquaintance which a good man keeps up with the word of God: *In that law doth he meditate day and night*; and by this it appears that his delight is in it, for what we love we love to think of, ^{<889>}Psalm 119:97. To meditate in God's word is to discourse with ourselves concerning the great things contained in it, with a close application of mind, a fixedness of thought, till we be suitably affected with those things and experience the savour and power of them in our hearts. This we must do *day and night*; we must have a constant habitual regard to the word of God as the rule of our actions and the spring of our comforts, and we must have it in our thoughts, accordingly, upon every occasion that occurs, whether night or day. No time is amiss for meditating on the word of God, nor is any time unseasonable for those visits. We must not only set ourselves to meditate on God's word morning and evening, at the entrance of the day and of the night, but these thought should be interwoven with the business and converse of every day and with the repose and slumbers of every night. *When I awake I am still with thee*.

II. An assurance given of the godly man's happiness, with which we should encourage ourselves to answer the character of such.

1. In general, he is *blessed*, ^{<881>}Psalm 5:1. God blesses him, and that blessing will make him happy. Blessednesses are to him, blessings of all kinds, of the upper and nether springs, enough to make him completely happy; none of the ingredients of happiness shall be wanting to him. When the psalmist undertakes to describe a blessed man, he describes a good man; for, after all, those only are happy, truly happy, that are holy, truly holy; and we are more concerned to know the way to blessedness than to know wherein that blessedness will consist. Nay, goodness and holiness are not only the way to happiness (^{<624>}Revelation 22:14) but happiness

itself; supposing there were not another life after this, yet that man is a happy man that keeps in the way of his duty.

2. His blessedness is here illustrated by a similitude (v. 3): *He shall be like a tree*, fruitful and flourishing. This is the effect,

(1.) Of his pious practice; he meditates in the law of God, turns that *in succum et sanguinem — into juice and blood*, and that makes him like a tree. The more we converse with the word of God the better furnished we are for every good word and work. Or,

(2.) Of the promised blessing; he is blessed of the Lord, and therefore *he shall be like a tree*. The divine blessing produces real effects. It is the happiness of a godly man,

[1.] That he is planted by the grace of God. These trees were by nature wild olives, and will continue so till they are grafted anew, and so planted by a power from above. Never any good tree grew of itself; it is *the planting of the Lord*, and therefore he must in it be glorified. ^{<261B>}Isaiah 61:3, *The trees of the Lord are full of sap*.

[2.] That he is placed by the means of grace, here called *the rivers of water*, those rivers which *make glad the city of our God* (^{<194B>}Psalm 46:4); from these a good man receives supplies of strength and vigour, but in secret undiscerned ways.

[3.] That his practices shall be fruit, abounding to a good account, ^{<104B>}Philippians 4:17. To those whom God first blessed he said, *Be fruitful* (^{<102B>}Genesis 1:22), and still the comfort and honour of fruitfulness are a recompense for the labour of it. It is expected from those who enjoy the mercies of grace that, both in the temper of their minds and in the tenour of their lives, they comply with the intentions of that grace, and then they bring forth fruit. And, be it observed to the praise of the great dresser of the vineyard, they bring forth their fruit (that which is required of them) *in due season*, when it is most beautiful and most useful, improving every opportunity of doing good and doing it in its proper time.

[4.] That his profession shall be preserved from blemish and decay: *His leaf also shall not wither*. As to those who bring forth only the leaves of profession, without any good fruit, even their leaf will wither and they shall be as much ashamed of their profession as ever they were proud of it; but, if the word of God rule in the heart, that will keep the profession

green, both to our comfort and to our credit; the laurels thus won shall never wither.

[5.] That prosperity shall attend him wherever he goes, soul-prosperity. *Whatever he does*, in conformity to the law, it *shall prosper* and succeed to his mind, or above his hope.

In singing these verses, being duly affected with the malignant and dangerous nature of sin, the transcendent excellencies of the divine law, and the power and efficacy of God's grace, from which our fruit is found, we must teach and admonish ourselves, and one another, to watch against sin and all approaches towards it, to converse much with the word of God, and abound in the fruit of righteousness; and, in praying over them, we must seek to God for his grace both to fortify us against every evil word and work and to furnish us for every good word and work.

⌘ PSALM 1:4-6

DESCRIPTION AND DOOM OF THE UNGODLY

Here is,

I. The description of the ungodly given, v. 4.

1. In general, they are the reverse of the righteous, both in character and condition: *They are not so*. The Septuagint emphatically repeats this: *Not so the ungodly; they are not so*; they are led by the counsel of the wicked, in the way of sinners, to the seat of the scornful; they have no delight in the law of God, nor ever think of it; they bring forth no fruit but grapes of Sodom; they cumber the ground.

2. In particular, whereas the righteous are like valuable, useful, fruitful trees, *they are like the chaff which the wind drives away*, the very lightest of the chaff, the dust which the owner of the floor desires to have driven away, as not capable of being put to any use. Would you value them? Would you weigh them? They are like chaff, of no worth at all in God's account, how highly soever they may value themselves. Would you know the temper of their minds? They are light and vain; they have no substance in them, no solidity; they are easily driven to and fro by every wind and temptation, and have no steadfastness. Would you know their end? The

wrath of God will drive them away in their wickedness, as the wind does the chaff, which is never gathered nor looked after more. The chaff may be, for a while, among the wheat; but he is coming *whose fan is in his hand* and who will *thoroughly purge his floor*. Those that by their own sin and folly make themselves as chaff will be found so before the whirlwind and fire of divine wrath (^{<1818>}Psalm 35:5), so unable to stand before it or to escape it, ^{<2173>}Isaiah 17:13.

II. The doom of the ungodly read, v. 5.

1. They will be cast, upon their trial, as traitors convicted: *They shall not stand in the judgment*, that is, they shall be found guilty, shall hang down the head with shame and confusion, and all their peals pleas and excuses will be overruled as frivolous. There is a judgment to come, in which every man's present character and work, though ever so artfully concealed and disguised, shall be truly and perfectly discovered, and appear in their own colours, and accordingly every man's future state will be, by an irreversible sentence, determined for eternity. The ungodly must appear in that judgment, to receive according to the things done in the body. They may hope to come off, nay, to come off with honour, but their hope will deceive them: *They shall not stand in the judgment*, so plain will the evidence be against them and so just and impartial will the judgment be upon it.

2. They will be for ever shut out from the society of the blessed. They shall not stand *in the congregation of the righteous*, that is, in the *judgment* (so some), that court wherein the saints, as assessors with Christ, shall judge the world, those holy myriads with which he shall come to execute *judgment upon all*, ^{<1814>}Jude 1:14; ^{<1817>}1 Corinthians 6:2. Or in *heaven*. There will be seen, shortly, a *general assembly of the church of the first-born, a congregation of the righteous*, of all the saints, and none but saints, and saints made perfect, such a congregation of them as never was in this world, ^{<1818>}2 Thessalonians 2:1. The wicked shall not have a place in that congregation. Into the new Jerusalem none unclean nor unsanctified shall enter; they shall see the righteous enter into the kingdom, and themselves, to their everlasting vexation, thrust out, ^{<1817>}Luke 13:27. The wicked and profane, in this world, ridiculed the righteous and their congregation, despised them, and cared not for their company; justly therefore will they be for ever separated from them. Hypocrites in this world, under the disguise of a plausible profession, may thrust themselves

into the congregation of the righteous and remain undisturbed and undiscovered there; but Christ cannot be imposed upon, though his ministers may; the day is coming when he will separate *between the sheep and the goats, the tares and the wheat*; see ^{<413>}Matthew 13:41, 49. That *great day* (so the Chaldee here calls it) will be a day of discovery, a day of distinction, and a day of final division. Then you shall return and discern between the righteous and the wicked, which here it is sometimes hard to do, ^{<413>}Malachi 3:18.

III. The reason rendered of this different state of the godly and wicked, v. 6.

1. God must have all the glory of the prosperity and happiness of the righteous. They are blessed because *the Lord knows their way*; he chose them into it, inclined them to choose it, leads and guides them in it, and orders all their steps.

2. Sinners must bear all the blame of their own destruction. *Therefore* the ungodly perish, because the very way in which they have chosen and resolved to walk leads directly to destruction; it naturally tends towards ruin and therefore must necessarily end in it. Or we may take it thus, The Lord approves and is well pleased with the way of the righteous, and therefore, under the influence of his gracious smiles, it shall prosper and end well; but he is angry at the way of the wicked, all they do is offensive to him, and therefore it shall perish, and they in it. It is certain that every man's judgment proceeds from the Lord, and it is well or ill with us, and is likely to be so to all eternity, accordingly as we are or are not accepted of God. Let this support the drooping spirits of the righteous, that the Lord knows their way, knows their hearts (^{<211>}Jeremiah 12:3), knows their secret devotions (^{<413>}Matthew 6:6), knows their character, how much soever it is blackened and blemished by the reproaches of men, and will shortly make them and their way manifest before the world, to their immortal joy and honour. Let this cast a damp upon the security and jollity of sinners, that their way, though pleasant now, will perish at last.

In singing these verses, and praying over them, let us possess ourselves with a holy dread of the wicked man's portion, and deprecate it with a firm and lively expectation of the judgment to come, and stir up ourselves to prepare for it, and with a holy care to approve ourselves to God in every thing, entreating his favour with our whole hearts.