

Scripture Studies

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“Come now, let us reason together,’ says the Lord...” I saiah 1:18

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Notice to Readers:

In commemoration of our tenth year, and to give the editor a Sabbathical of sorts, we are republishing our first five issues to finish out this year. We will continue with our current studies (D.V.) starting next year.

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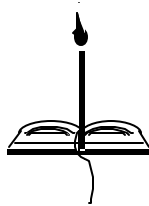
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May God bless you as you study His Word.



Old Testament Study: Genesis 1:1-13

In the Beginning

^{1:1}In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.

So begins the first book of the Bible. We call it “Genesis” (which means “beginning”), and appropriately so. For Genesis not only recounts the beginning of the creation in which we live, but it introduces, whether explicitly or in type, nearly all the major doctrines and themes of the Bible. Indeed, it introduces issues that, throughout the ages, have confronted mankind: the existence of God, the fall of man, spiritual warfare, faith, providence, obedience, accountability, judgment, grace. Yet, Genesis is written in simple language that a child can understand. It is basically the story of six men and their families: Adam, Noah, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and Joseph. How appropriate that the Bible, whose theme is the Gospel of Jesus Christ (a message that can be understood by a child, yet has the power to save), begins with a book that can be understood by a child, and yet, introduces the most important issues that confront man.

Genesis begins with an account of the creation of the universe in which we live. The account is very simply written by Moses (the human author of Genesis), barely filling two pages of text. Moses did not have the “benefit” of modern science, but he has written an account of the creation that has withstood the test of time. Countless libraries of books concerning the origins of the universe have been written through the ages but, ultimately, the validity of each of these countless books stands or falls on whether it agrees with this two-page explanation of the creation. It has proved to be an accurate account, although there have been innumerable explicit attempts to prove it wrong. Thus, in the first two pages of the Bible, we are faced with the realization that the Bible, in itself, is a miracle. This account of the creation could only have been inspired by the Creator Himself.

“**In the beginning**” speaks of the beginning of our creation. God, of course, had no beginning and will have no end. The creation, as affirmed here, did have a beginning. This is also borne out by scientific observation, much to the chagrin of those who would like to think that there is no God. You see, a “**beginning**” implies an infinite Creator. This can be proved simply:

- (1) Out of nothing comes nothing.
- (2) Since there exists something (namely, the universe), statement (1) implies one of the two following possibilities:
 - (a) The universe always existed or
 - (b) The universe was created by a Creator that always existed.
- (3) By observation, namely, the Second Law of Thermodynamics, we know that the universe did not always exist. (The Second Law of Thermodynamics states, in summary, that after any energy exchange or reaction, one is left with more “disorder” than one started with. Since the universe is not infinitely disordered, it cannot be infinitely old).
- (4) Thus, the universe was created by something that always existed: an infinite Creator (since statement (3) nullifies statement (2a), making statement (2b) true).

Thus, by what we observe, we can prove the existence of an infinite Creator (whom we call “God”). To refute this proof, one has to reject one of the basic laws of science, the Second Law of Thermodynamics. In other words, it takes more faith to be an atheist than to believe in God (cf. Rom. 1:20). Admittedly, this proof does not tell us much about the nature of God (except that He is the Creator and He is infinite); the rest of the Bible expands on the nature of God.

So, the universe did have a beginning. Before this “**beginning**”, however, important decisions were made in regard to us. Among them: we were chosen to be saved (Eph. 1:4) and Christ was chosen to die in order to save us (I Pet. 1:20).

The words “**God created**” are significant to everyone who has existed and ever will exist. By them, all are made accountable to a higher being. As the elders say in the book of Revelation: “**You are worthy, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honor and power, for you created all things**” (Rev. 4:11). In itself, the fact that God created the heavens and the earth makes Him worthy to receive our praise.

Evidence that an intelligent being created the universe is inescapable. One cannot help but notice that everything in the universe, from the largest galaxy to the minutest particle, was designed. A design, in itself, implies a designer. Design does not occur by accident. This is intuitive to all. One cannot look at the inner workings of a watch without realizing that it was designed. It would be absurd to claim that the watch just came together by chance. The eye itself that examines the watch has a much more complex and beautiful design than the watch; yet, despite its design, some would claim that the eye came together by chance.

Now, the existence of a design implies a purpose. A designer of a watch designs the watch for the purpose of keeping time. Likewise, our Creator has designed us with a purpose. “**For we are God’s workman-**

ship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do." (Eph. 2:10). We are more beautifully designed than the watch in that we have free will to decide for ourselves whether to fulfill the purpose for which we were designed. We can choose to seek God's will for us, or we can choose to follow our own desires. Consider this though: a watch, if it fails to keep time properly, will be discarded. Similarly, the extent to which we fulfill or ignore our God-given purpose will determine our destiny. Thus, just as a design implies a designer, and a designer implies a purpose, so too, the existence of a purpose implies a destiny.

"God created the heavens and the earth". **"The heavens"** are significant in that they are the dwelling place of God within His creation. God could have chosen to create the universe and live outside it. Our God chose to be a part of His creation. This reflects His care and direct interest in the goings-on in the universe. Many who would affirm the existence of God would deny that He takes an active interest in His creation. This is refuted implicitly by the fact that **"God created the heavens"**. It is also refuted by reason: why would God create a universe and then turn His back on it? But, alas, it is more comfortable for someone to believe in a God that has no concern for His creation, because belief in an impersonal God leaves one accountable to no higher power.

"The earth", of course, signifies our dwelling place. And so, God begins by creating His own dwelling place, and then ours.

Disorder

²Now the earth was formless and empty, darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters.

The creation started in chaos and disorder, thus, **"formless and empty"**. During each day of creation, God brought the creation to a higher state of order. After the seventh day, the creation was at its highest state of order. Then, the fall of man occurred and the Second Law of Thermodynamics began to take effect. At that time, the creation started its **"bondage to decay"** (see Rom. 8:21).

However, the creation will be renewed to order again after Christ returns. Then, the new heaven and new earth will be created. Peter says in Acts 3:21: Christ **"must remain in heaven until the time comes for God to restore everything"**. Jesus, Himself, calls the time when He reigns on earth **"the renewal of all things"** (Matt. 19:28). For those in Christ, this renewing has already begun (praise the Lord), as Paul states: **"Therefore we do not lose heart. Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day"** (II Cor. 4:16).

Initially, the creation was **"dark"**, thus **"darkness"** is linked to disorder.

der. Darkness in the Bible is, of course, a symbol of sin and evil. Fallen man loves darkness (John 3:19), but **“God is light”** (I John 1:5).

“The Spirit of God”, which was **“hovering over the waters”**, participates in the creation. Jesus, the Son, also participates, as noted in Heb. 1:2; John 1:3; Col. 1:16, et. al. Thus, all three persons of the Holy Trinity were involved in the creation.

The First Day: Light

³And God said, “Let there be light,” and there was light. ⁴God saw that the light was good, and He separated the light from the darkness. ⁵God called the light “day,” and the darkness He called “night”. And there was evening, and there was morning—the first day.

God’s first direct quote in the Bible is **“Let there be light.”** With these words, He demonstrates the power of His words: they have the power to bring forth light to conquer the darkness, just as now His words bring forth light to a dark world.

Some would have a problem that the **“light”** was created before the “light-bearers” (such as the sun and the stars), which were created on the fourth day. Those who are puzzled by this have two questions: (1) From where did the light emanate?; (2) Can observations in science support the proposition that light came before the light-bearers?

To answer these:

First, the light emanated directly from God. The Creator of the universe certainly had the ability to be an ongoing source of light until He created the light-bearers. Interestingly, the New Jerusalem in the new earth, similarly, will be lit directly with God’s light (Rev. 21:23).

Second, from a scientific point of view, it is intriguing that **“light”** was created first. You see, observationally, the one absolute in the world of science is the speed of light. Thus, scientifically, it makes sense that light was created first. Also, each day of creation can be scientifically viewed as bringing the universe to a higher state of order. So we see, in the seven days of creation, the universe going from the highest state of entropy (or disorder) to the highest state of order. Pure light is pure energy, unordered into matter and thus, at the highest state of disorder. So, for the creation to progress from disorder to order, light would necessarily have to be created before the light-bearers.

Note that God **“separated the light from the darkness.”** This is God’s desire: that light not mix with darkness, that the children of light keep away from the deeds of darkness, that the saints be holy and not conformed to this world where, indeed, darkness still is **“over the surface of the deep.”** Note that God did not eliminate the darkness with the light,

but separated the light from the darkness. Originally man, in the light and fellowship with God, was separated from the darkness. But darkness indwelt the serpent; then, when man fell, darkness indwelt man. Thus, the external separation between light and darkness became an internal battle between light and darkness, and has remained so ever since.

The Second Day: Separation from God

⁶And God said, "Let there be an expanse between the waters to separate water from water." ⁷So God made an expanse and separated the waters under the expanse from the waters above it. And it was so. ⁸God called the expanse "sky". And there was evening and there was morning—the second day.

Here God creates the earth's atmosphere, separating the waters that are to be formed into the land and seas from the waters that form the earth's atmospheric protection.

It seems, however, that God is less pleased with this day of creation. This is the only day of creation that God did not bless by pronouncing it as "**good**". Why not? Symbolically, the "**waters above**" separate the earth from God. God desires, above all, fellowship with His creatures. He has gone to great lengths to maintain a relationship with His creatures, even though we have consistently and universally turned our backs on Him. It should come as no surprise, then, that He does not bless the separation of the earth from His wonderful light.

The Third Day: New Life

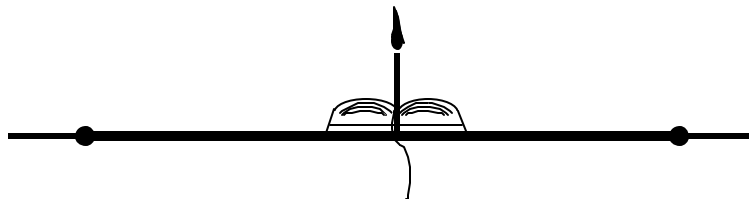
⁹And God said, "Let the water under the sky be gathered to one place, and let dry ground appear." And it was so. ¹⁰God called the dry ground "land", and the gathered waters He called "seas". And God saw that it was good. ¹¹Then God said, "Let the land produce vegetation: seed-bearing plants and trees on the land that bear fruit with seed in it, according to their various kinds." And it was so. ¹²The land produced vegetation: plants bearing seed according to their kinds and trees bearing fruit with seed in it according to their kinds. And God saw that it was good. ¹³And there was evening, and there was morning—the third day.

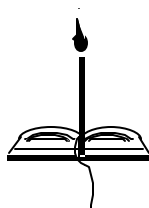
Here God creates the land. Scientists have observed that the continents once formed one great land mass. This matches the implication in these verses that there was one sea and one mass of land. Once again, ob-

ervation supports the creation account. Interestingly, science is, in the last few hundred years, starting to catch up with what the Bible has stated all along! Unfortunately, the goal of many scientists is to develop scientific theory specifically to disprove the existence of God and to refute the Biblical account of creation. Stephen Hawking, one of the world's foremost theoretical physicists (unfortunately, not a professing Christian), acknowledges this when he describes the motives of many scientists to refute the Big Bang theory (a theory that supports the existence of a Creator): "Many people do not like the idea that time has a beginning, probably because it smacks of divine intervention...There were therefore a number of attempts to avoid the conclusion that there had been a big bang." (A Brief History of Time, Stephen Hawking, pp. 46-47).

Note that God says, "**Let the land produce**". So, as early as the third day, God allows His creation to self-sufficiently carry out His work, albeit under His direction. The majority of the time, God chooses to do His work through His creation, rather than to directly intervene. He, in fact, forbids us to depend on His direct intervention when there is a more natural way to proceed: "**Do not put the Lord your God to the test**" (Matt. 4:7, cf. Deut. 6:16). Note that God had ordered the days of creation so that the land could produce and sustain plant life: there was light, there was atmosphere, there was water. So too, in our lives, God orders our development to prepare us to do His work and bear fruit to His glory. As cited above, "**...we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do**" (Eph. 2:10). Of course, though we carry out His work, God still plays a role in our fruit-bearing: He prepares us for it; He makes a way for it to happen; He supports us through it; and, if done right, He receives the glory and praise resulting from it.

Heavenly Father, our perfect Creator, give us an appreciation for the beauty of Your creation; give us an awe for Your power as Creator; give us an understanding of You as Creator so that our faith may be strengthened and that we may glorify You for what so many would attribute to chance. We ask these things in Jesus' name, through whom You created all things, Amen.





A Study of Exhortation Romans 12:1

[This is the first part in a series of articles that will study the exhortations in Romans 12. Romans 12 contains a series of exhortations, each one of which provides an abundance of material for meditation and application.]—*Ed.*

Offering Yourselves to God

¹Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God—this is your spiritual act of worship (Romans 12:1).

Paul begins his series of exhortations in Romans 12 with the fundamental duty of a Christian: to offer themselves in service to God. He says **"I urge you"** because, though we are God's people, it is our choice to offer ourselves to His service. The gift of salvation we received is free. Though we may be duty-bound to offer ourselves to God, we are not legally-bound to do so.

Paul reminds them that they are **"brothers"**, as if to induce them to compare their lives to his own, a life offered in complete service to God. We too should look at the lives of the great men of God, and not forget that they are our brothers. They were ordinary men, as James reminds us: **"Elijah was a man, just like us"** (James 5:17). However, what distinguished them is that they yielded themselves to God. God honored this and used them mightily. Our lives should be offered to God every bit as much as theirs was. It is our duty as their brothers.

The impetus that Paul gives for offering our lives to God is **"in view of God's mercy"**. Along the same lines, he begins the sentence with **"Therefore"**, which ties this exhortation to the previous chapter. Paul ended the previous chapter speaking of God's mercy (see Rom. 11:30-32). Then, he broke into a great doxology concerning God's mercy:

³³**Oh, the depth of the riches
of the wisdom and knowledge of God!
How unsearchable His judgments,**

and His paths beyond tracing out!
**³⁴“Who has known the mind of the Lord?
Or who has been His counselor?”**
**³⁵“Who has ever given to God,
that God should repay him?”**
**³⁶For from Him and through Him
and to Him are all things.
To Him be the glory forever! Amen.**

So it is this mercy that should cause us to offer ourselves in service to God. Indeed, the extent to which we do not offer ourselves to God reflects the extent to which we do not understand the depth and significance of God's mercy. By His great mercy we live! By His great mercy we live forever! This mercy should elicit a response in our lives: the offering of ourselves to God.

Earlier in Romans, Paul says, **“...offer yourselves to God, as those who have been brought from death to life”** (Rom. 6:13). Now, if we had actually tasted death, if we had actually experienced what we have been saved from, I dare say that we would be much more willing to offer ourselves in service to God. We fail to do so, in large part, because we fail to understand the extent of the suffering and torment that we have been saved from. If God required us to taste, even for a moment, the punishment of hell (which, indeed, we deserve), He certainly would have more children who are entirely devoted to Him; for He would have more children who truly understand the depths of His mercy. However, God is merciful: we do not, even for a moment, have to taste death. Instead Christ **“suffered death, so that by the grace of God, He might taste death for everyone”** (Heb. 2:9). Oh, the depth of His mercy!

Paul urges to **“offer your bodies”**. **“Offer”** again points out that our service is voluntary. By offering our **“bodies”**, we are offering what has been bought by Christ anyway: **“You are not your own; you were bought at a price. Therefore honor God with your body”** (I Cor. 6:20).

Also, to offer our **“bodies”** suggests active, visible and physical service to God. Yes, we should worship in spirit, pray in spirit and commune with God in spirit, but we should also physically serve God with our bodies.

Furthermore, by offering our **“bodies”**, we deprive our bodies their service to sin. When our body is serving the Lord, it cannot simultaneously be serving its worldly lusts. **“For we know that our old self was crucified with Him so that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves to sin”** (Rom. 6:6).

We are to be **“living sacrifices”**. This is in stark contrast to the old

covenant sacrifices, that were sacrificed to death. The old covenant sacrifice was a destructive sacrifice, the new covenant living sacrifice is constructive. The old covenant sacrifice necessarily had to die, because it was paying the price for the sin of the sacrificer. The new covenant sacrifice can be living because the price for the sin of the sacrificer has already been paid.

In a sense, to be a **“living sacrifice”** is more difficult than to be a sacrifice unto death. Most of us, as Christians, would not hesitate to die a heroic death for the sake of the gospel of Christ. But we, at the same time, have difficulty being a consistent living sacrifice for Christ in our day-to-day lives. We would go boldly down in flames for Christ, yet we shy away from an opportunity to witness at our work place. We would bravely die a martyr’s death for Christ, yet we fail to glorify God to others for the work He has done in our lives; instead we say, “Well, I guess I just got lucky.” But we are called to be **“living”** sacrifices.

As sacrifices, we are to be **“holy”**. **“Holy”** signifies set apart for God. Many non-Christians perform “godly” works, but they are not holy. They do not perform their works to God and for God. They do their “godly” works and then return to the world to profane God. We are to be always **“holy”**, always set apart for God.

Moreover, as sacrifices, we are to be **“pleasing to God”**. Sacrifice for sacrifice sake is worthless. Cain offered a sacrifice to God, but it was not pleasing to God. Again, many worldly people make sacrifices for “godly” works, but they are not performed in the manner prescribed by God and not according to His guidance and direction.

“This is your spiritual act of worship”. We worship God not only in the singing of praises to the Lord, but more importantly, in the giving of our lives to Him. The first mention of worship in the Bible is in Gen. 22:5, where Abraham says: **“Stay here with the donkey while I and the boy go over there. We will worship and then we will come back to you”**. This was when Abraham was, in obedience to God, going to offer his son Isaac at the altar. Thus, the first mention of worship is connected with obedience to God and the offer of a life to God, in accordance with His command. Therefore, the most important form of worship that you can render to God is obedience to Him and the offering of your life to Him, according to His will, as a living sacrifice.

Now, Father, plant this exhortation in our hearts and cause us to meditate on the depth of Your mercy, so that we would make ourselves living sacrifices to You. Direct us in areas of service that would be pleasing to You as we seek to offer our bodies to You. We ask these things in the name of Jesus, Amen.

New Testament Study:

James 1:1-8



The Epistle of James

With all the writings in the New Testament concerning the riches of God's grace, freely given to us, we must be careful not to take advantage of these riches and ignore our duties as followers of Christ. It is indicated in Scripture that those whose lives do not bear fruit to God may not truly be children of God (Matt. 7:17-21; Titus 1:16; I John 3:17-19). Certainly, it is not the fruit itself that makes us children of God; nevertheless, a life that bears good fruit is a necessary result of a new birth into God's family. The lack of such fruit in one's life, however, should not drive one to frantically do good works in order to, in this way, truly become a child of God. Rather, it should drive one to his knees to seek from God a true birth into the kingdom. Then God will work in His child's life and give him the desire and circumstances to bear good fruit.

To the world, it should be obvious by our actions that we are children of God. Christ Himself says: **"Let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven"** (Matt. 5:16). Peter warns us not to be **"ineffective and unproductive"** in our knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ (II Pet. 1:8). Paul warns us not to **"show contempt for the riches of His kindness, tolerance and patience"** (Rom. 2:4). While we certainly should rejoice and praise God for the magnificent free gift of life that we have received, we should by no means allow this comfort to develop into laziness.

Thus, we have the Epistle of James. This epistle is full of exhortations concerning the proper actions and attitude of a true child of God. It does not, as some would have it, contradict the doctrines of the free grace of God; rather, it complements this teaching and exhorts us to live lives worthy of those who truly understand the magnificence of the gift we have received.

Salutation

¹James, a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ,
To the twelve tribes scattered among the nations: Greetings.

“James”, the human author of this book, is most certainly the brother of Jesus (or, technically, His half brother). James was a well-respected man by both Jews and Christians, acquiring the nickname of James the Just. He was, apparently, a leader of the Christian Church in Jerusalem. He is noted in the book of Acts as the author (no doubt inspired by the Holy Spirit) of the compromise that resolved the dispute at the Council of Jerusalem (Acts 15:1-33).

“A servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ”: James begins his letter by emphasizing his spiritual relationship with Christ, rather than his earthly relationship as brother. It is hard for us to imagine the difficulty Christ’s immediate family had in accepting Him as Savior, Lord and Creator of the universe. They grew up with Him. They knew Him as a child, watching Him as He was being apprenticed as a carpenter. Certainly, He was no ordinary child, and from early on, He had a deep relationship with and knowledge of God (cf. Luke 2:46-50). Yet, it must have been difficult for His family to come to terms with the Lordship of Christ.

Indeed, during His ministry on earth, His family apparently did not believe in Him (see John 7:5). They even considered Him crazy when (typically concerned for their family member) He was neglecting His meals for the work of His ministry (see Mark 3:20-21). Yet, as a great testimony to the truth of Christ’s Lordship over all, His family apparently did come to believe in Him and exalt Him as Lord.

In fact, two of Jesus’ brothers, James and Jude, wrote epistles in the New Testament. Interestingly, just as James began his letter by emphasizing his spiritual relationship to Christ, so also Jude, in his epistle, opens with **“Jude, a servant of Jesus Christ and brother of James”** (Jude 1:1). Thus, he also emphasizes his duty as a servant of Jesus over his earthly relationship with Christ.

“To the twelve tribes scattered among the nations”: James, as a leader in the Church in Jerusalem, was writing primarily to the Jewish believers throughout the world, though, of course, what he wrote applies to us all. It is a comfort that, though **“scattered among the nations”**, the people of God remain the people of God. We are citizens of God’s kingdom, ambassadors of Christ, regardless of the earthly flag under which we reside. It is also a comfort that nearly no matter where our journey on earth takes us, we can find God’s people, fellow pilgrims living in this foreign world.

Joy Through Suffering

²Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds, ³because you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance. ⁴Perseverance must finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything.

James exhorts us here to have joy through suffering. He says, **“Consider it pure joy”**. That we must **“Consider”** implies that joy is not the natural reaction to suffering. Nevertheless, we are to arm ourselves with this attitude in light of the positive results that the suffering brings:

(1) It brings future rewards, as it did for Moses: **“He regarded disgrace for the sake of Christ as of greater value than the treasures of Egypt, because he was looking ahead to his reward”** (Heb. 11:26).

(2) It strengthens our character: **“No discipline seems pleasant at the time, but painful. Later on, however, it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it”** (Heb. 12:11); **“...we also rejoice in our sufferings, because we know suffering produces perseverance, perseverance character, and character hope”** (Rom. 5:4).

(3) It brings future glory: **“Now if we are children, then we are heirs—heirs of God and coheirs with Christ, if indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory. I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us”** (Rom. 8:17-18).

James says **“pure joy”**, meaning the utmost joy, unsurpassable joy, joy that is unmixed with sorrow. To maintain this level of joy through hardship, we must have an acute awareness of the riches and blessings of the glory that we will experience. We must have faith that God will carry out His promise and give us a glorious life in heaven.

“Whenever” suggests: first, that we will assuredly face trials; second, that trials will come often.

The trials will be **“of many kinds”**. We live in a desparately, fallen world. Man has entered into sin of many kinds; thus, we face trials of many kinds. Even the holiest men of God are not exempt from the many kinds of trials, as Paul relates: **“Five times I received from the Jews the forty lashes minus one. Three times I was beaten with rods, once I was stoned, three times I was shipwrecked, I spent a night and a day in the open sea, I have been constantly on the move. I have been in danger from rivers, in danger from bandits, in danger from my own countrymen, in danger at sea; and in danger from false brothers. I**

have labored and toiled and have often gone without sleep; I have known hunger and thirst and have often gone without food; I have been cold and naked” (II Cor. 11:24-28).

The reason for the trials is **“the testing of your faith”**, for what good is untested faith? It is not faith at all. The result of the testing is **“perseverance”**. Note, that it is **“develop”**ed perseverance. God’s purpose in our trials is that we should **“develop”**, grow into the child of God He wants us to be, as we are conformed to the likeness of Christ.

The final goal of this process is that we should become **“mature and complete, not lacking anything”**. God does not give up on us, but continues to shape and mold us until we are complete. **“He who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus”** (Phil. 1:6). We can only attain completeness from God through Christ. Those of the world will never be complete. No matter how successful in the eyes of the world, they will always be lacking, just as the man who came to Jesus in Matt. 19 seeking eternal life. From the world’s point of view, the man had everything: he was rich, young, up-standing and moral. Yet, he says, **“What do I still lack?”** (Matt. 19:13). Despite his worldly success, he realized that he was lacking fulfillment.

Praying for Wisdom

⁵If any of you lacks wisdom, he should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to him. ⁶But when he asks, he must believe and not doubt, because he who doubts is like a wave of the sea, blown and tossed by the wind. ⁷That man should not think he will receive anything from the Lord; ⁸he is a double-minded man, unstable in all he does.

James, in this exhortation, gives us the benefit of the doubt, and pre-sumes, by saying **“if”**, that some of us do not lack wisdom! Certainly, we all **“lack wisdom”** in various degrees. The remedy for our lack of wisdom is to seek it through prayer. We must take care, however, to seek Godly wisdom; for there is a wisdom of the world that is contrary to the wisdom of God. **“Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world?”** (I Cor. 1:20). Even Solomon, who is renowned for his wisdom, at the end of his life allowed worldly wisdom to overshadow Godly wisdom. But, the most uneducated beggar who knows Jesus Christ is wiser than the most respected scholar who does not. **“The fool says in his heart, “There is no God”**” (Ps. 14:1).

It is Godly wisdom that He **“gives generously to all”**. And why not? Certainly God is happy to hear us pray for something that will make us

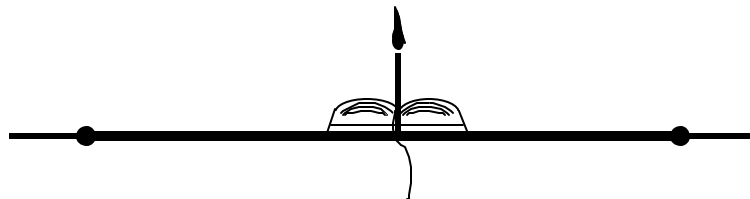
spiritually stronger, rather than praying to satisfy our worldly appetites (as we so often do).

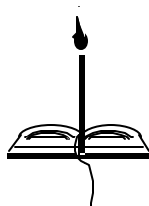
Note that God responds to our requests for wisdom **“without finding fault”**. To pray for wisdom is to come to God in humility, acknowledging our need for His wisdom. Many in the world often look down on the one who acknowledges his own weaknesses. Not so God. God will never find fault in a prayer from a humble heart, for **“God opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble”** (James 4:6; I Pet. 5:5; cf. Prov. 3:34).

When we ask God for wisdom, we **“must not doubt”**. **“If you, then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give good gifts to those who ask Him!”** (Matt. 7:11). Those who doubt have the wrong concept of God’s character, thus reflecting that they do not have a strong faith in the true God. Doubt that God will fulfill this request springs from either (1) doubt that it is God’s will that we be strengthened spiritually (thus doubting God’s goodness) or (2) doubt that God is able to strengthen us spiritually (thus doubting God’s power). How can someone who doubts that God will answer a prayer for wisdom expect to **“receive anything from the Lord”**, given his view of God’s character?

This lack of faith makes one **“double-minded”** and **“unstable”**. How can they be stable? **“Who is the Rock except our God?”** (Ps. 18:31). If they do not trust the Rock and only sure foundation, they certainly will be unstable.

Father, we praise You and thank You that we can rejoice even in the testing of our faith. Thank You that this testing is under Your guidance and control, so that it is not a futile testing, but a testing that is meant to strengthen us. We also thank you that we can come to you with our request for Godly wisdom, and that our request will be granted. We praise You that You desire us to grow spiritually. We offer this thanksgiving in the name of Your Son Jesus, Amen.





A Study for Edification Scripture Memorization

Scripture Memorization, pt. 1 – Why Memorize Scripture?

This is the first part in a series of articles about memorizing Scripture. This article will be concerned with why one should memorize Scripture. Subsequent articles will concern specific techniques to aid in memorizing individual verses and then techniques in memorizing longer passages, such as chapters and books of the Bible.

So, before we look at techniques for memorizing parts of the Bible, we must first ask: Why should we go to the trouble of memorizing the Bible? Here are some reasons:

1. We are commanded to: **“These commandments that I give you today are to be upon your hearts”** (Deut. 6:6). **“Fix these words of mine in your hearts and minds; tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads”** (Deut. 11:18).

2. Storing the Word of God in our hearts and minds helps us to obey it: **“...the word is very near you; it is in your mouth and in your heart so you may obey it”** (Deut. 30:14); **“The law of God is in his heart; his feet do not slip”** (Ps. 37:31); **“I have hidden Your word in my heart that I might not sin against You”** (Ps. 119:11).

3. It will make us prosperous (because of our increased obedience): **“Do not let this Book of the Law depart from your mouth; meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do everything written in it. Then you will be prosperous and successful”** (Josh. 1:8).

4. It prevents vain and evil thoughts. When memorizing scripture, one must necessarily dwell on the Word of God during one's spare time. This will crowd out less edifying thoughts. Through Scripture memorization one can easily obey Paul's exhortation: **“...whatever is true, whatever noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things”** (Phil. 4:8).

5. It is a weapon against temptation. Christ is our example on this point. In Matt. 4 and Luke 4, He resisted Satan's temptations each time by citing Scripture. Paul states that the Word of God is a weapon in spiritual warfare: **"Take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God"** (Eph. 6:17).

6. It increases our understanding of the verses that are memorized. To memorize, one must know every single word and dwell on every single word. While doing this, one naturally asks oneself, "why this word?" Meditation on each word will, through the Spirit, give one a deep understanding of the verse and reveal meanings that are hidden to a cursory reading. **"I have more insight than all my teachers, for I meditate on Your statutes"** (Ps. 119:99).

7. It aids in witnessing and teaching. If the Word is in your heart, the Holy Spirit will bring it to mind at the appropriate time. **"Let the Word of Christ dwell in you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom"** (Col. 3:16).

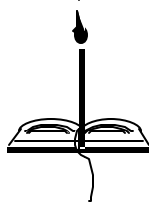
8. Even when without a Bible, one can still meditate, counsel, comfort and reprove from the Word of God. **"Even at night my heart instructs me"** (Ps. 16:7).

9. It aids us in our prayers. What better way to talk to God than to be familiar with the language of God through His Word? Note Paul says: **"Take...the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God"** and then **"And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests"** (Eph. 6:17,18).

10. It improves our everyday conversation. What we say reflects what we meditate on and store in our hearts. **"For out of the overflow of the heart the mouth speaks"** (Matt. 12:34).

Now, Heavenly Father, give us the desire and the means to store Your perfect Word in our hearts; direct the time and the circumstances to accomplish this; give us diligence to be faithful in this; give us the opportunity to make fruitful use of the Word that we store in our hearts. We ask these things in the name of and for the glory of Jesus Christ, Amen.

(Next issue: techniques to aid in the memorization of Bible verses.)



A Study in Psalms: Psalm 1

Psalm 1 – The Righteous Man Contrasted with the Wicked

¹Blessed is the man
who does not walk in the counsel of the wicked
or stand in the way of sinners
or sit in the seat of mockers.

²But his delight is in the law of the Lord,
and on His law he meditates day and night.

³He 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.

⁴Not so the wicked!
They are like chaff
that the wind blows away.

⁵Therefore the wicked will not
stand in the judgment
Nor sinners in the assembly of the righteous.

⁶For the Lord watches over the way of the righteous,
but the way of the wicked will perish.

The First Psalm contrasts a righteous man and a wicked man. As true poetry, in its six short verses, this Psalm contains a wealth of information about the righteous and the wicked. The Psalmist describes them literally and figuratively; he portrays their attitudes and actions; he relates their respective destinies. The first and last words of the Psalm, in themselves, point out the differing destinies of the righteous and the wicked: the righteous will be “**Blessed**”, the wicked will “**perish**”.

As for the structure of this Psalm: verses 1-3 describe the righteous man; verses 4-5 describe the wicked man; verse 6 offers a summarizing contrast between the righteous and the wicked.

In verse 1, “**Blessed**” denotes complete happiness. The Psalmist goes on to state that complete happiness can be found by refraining from cer-

tain unrighteous activities, namely, walking **“in the counsel of the wicked”**, standing **“in the way of sinners”**, and sitting **“in the seat of mockers”**. The extent to which we refrain from these activities determines the extent to which we are truly happy. None of us completely refrain from doing these things; thus, none of us experience complete happiness.

Note the actions associated with these unrighteous activities: **“walking”**, **“standing”**, then **“sitting”**. Collectively, they completely describe the three postures of man as he carries on his day-to-day business. He is either walking, standing or sitting. Thus, if all of these actions are performed in an unrighteous manner, the regimen of one's entire life is affected. Moreover, note the progression of the actions. One **“walks”** least frequent; one **“stands”** a little more often; one **“sits”** most often. Thus, the three activities seem to form a progression in the participant's life from infrequent to often engagement in unrighteous activity.

Note the location of the unrighteous activities: **“in the counsel”**, **“in the way”**, and **“in the seat”**. Again, we find a progression. **“In the counsel”** suggests occasional participation; **“in the way”** suggests habitual involvement; **“in the seat”** suggests permanent association with the unrighteous activities.

Finally, note the accomplices in the unrighteous activities: **“the wicked”**, **“the sinners”**, and **“the mockers”**. Once again, we see a progression. **“The wicked”** are those who knowingly violate the command of God. Although they knowingly violate the command, they have enough familiarity with the commands to know them. **“Sinners”** are those whose way of life falls short of the Godly standard. Many **“sinners”** do not even know they violate God's command. This does not excuse them, for they should be familiar with God's law. **“Mockers”** are those who openly show contempt for God's law. They not only stumble in the law, they also despise it.

Thus, by way of application: Be alert! The path to unrighteousness is progressive. One does not fall into unrighteousness over night; one **“walks”** then **“stands”** then **“sits”**; one participates then habituates then dwells; one stumbles then sins then mocks. Do not progress toward ungodliness! Turn back! Repent!

“But his delight is the law of the Lord.” The word **“But”** is to denote contrast to the **“mockers”** of the previous verse. The **“mockers”** show contempt for God's law; the righteous **“delight”** in it. Note, the righteous do not merely obey God's law, nor do they merely respect it, trust in it and fear it (all of which are commendable); but they **“delight”** in it. It is their joy and pleasure.

This **“delight”** is demonstrated by their **“meditation”** on the law.

They do not merely study the law for duty's sake, but they "**meditate**" on the law because it is their delight. They do not pigeonhole their consideration of the law to a short, daily quiet time; but they "**meditate**" on it "**day and night**". It is the subject to which their thoughts naturally turn; it is the favorite resting place for their wandering mind.

Now, in the time when the Psalmist was writing, the righteous could only meditate on the unfinished revelation of God. They had the Law, but not the Gospel (nor even the Prophets, at the time of Psalm 1). How much more should we delight in God's completed revelation!

In verse 3, the Psalmist describes the righteous man figuratively. In drawing this picture, the Psalmist describes many aspects the righteous man's character and situation.

"He is like a tree planted by streams of water." Notice, that he is not a tree growing wild, but a "planted tree". Furthermore, the tree is "**planted**" with care "**by streams of water**". The planter, of course, is the Lord. The Lord is described as a "planter" of His people in other places, most notably, Isaiah 5: "**My loved one had a vineyard on a fertile hillside. He dug it up and cleared it of stones and planted it with the choicest vines**" (Isa. 5:1,2). Later, Isaiah states, "**The vineyard of the Lord Almighty is the house of Israel**" (Isa. 5:7). When God plants His people, He does so in the choicest spot. For the vineyard in Isaiah, it was the "**fertile hillside**". For the tree in Psalm 1 (representing the righteous man), it is "**by streams of water**". The placement of the tree is chosen so that it would yield the most fruit.

And, indeed, it "**yields its fruit in season**". "**Fruit**", of course, in the Bible represents good works in one's life that bring glory to God. Notice that the fruit appears "**in season**". This signifies that the fruit was produced under the guidance and in the timing of God.

Its "**leaf does not wither**". Therefore, it keeps its beauty and health. So, the tree remains fruitful, beautiful and healthy. The Psalmist sums this up by saying, "**Whatever he does prospers.**"

The wicked, however, do not prosper, thus: "**Not so the wicked.**" The wicked are figuratively represented, not as a fruitful tree, but as chaff that is good for nothing. In contrast to the carefully chosen placement of the tree, the chaff is blown by the wind. So, while the righteous man (depicted by the tree) has a well-planned, fruitful and prosperous existence, the wicked man's existence (depicted by the chaff) is useless, purposeless and haphazard.

The wicked are often spoken of as chaff in the Bible. Notably, when John the Baptist describes Christ's coming judgment, he says that Christ will "**clear His threshing floor, gathering His wheat into the barn and burning up the chaff with unquenchable fire**" (Matt. 3:12).

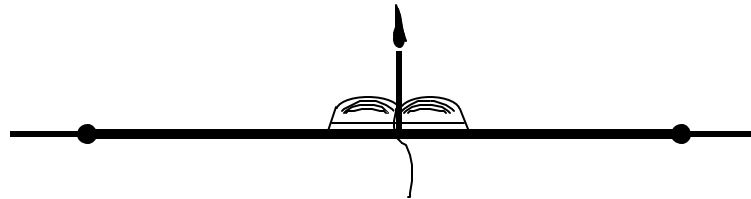
"Therefore" (because they have a meaningless existence) **"the**

wicked will not stand in the judgment.” God will judge the wicked. Many fault God because, many times, the wicked seem to prosper. God is merciful, even to the detriment of His name. It is God’s will that the wicked repent, so He is patient in dealing with the wicked. All who would fault God for not doling out instantaneous judgment on the wicked, should look at their own lives. God has been merciful to us all. Rather than calling down judgment from heaven, pray that the wicked would turn from their ways and glorify God.

Also, sinners will not stand **“in the assembly of the righteous”**. Currently, the righteous and the wicked reside together. As one commentator states: “Albeit now the ungodly and godly do live together, mixed in one kingdom, city, incorporation, visible church, family, and bed possibly.” [Dickson, 3]. There will come a time when the righteous and the wicked are separated. This is described in many ways in the Bible: separation of the wheat from the chaff, the tares from the wheat, the good fish from the bad fish, etc. The wicked will be judged and thrown into hell, the righteous (that is, those clothed with the righteousness of Christ, for none are truly righteous on their own) will gather in the great assembly and praise the Lord. This great assembly is described in the Book of Revelation: **“Then I heard every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and on the sea, and all that is in them, singing: ‘To Him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb be praise and honor and glory and power, for ever and ever!’”** (Rev. 5:13).

To conclude, the Psalmist summarizes the contrast between the righteous and the wicked: **“For the Lord watches over the way of the righteous, but the way of the wicked will perish”**. This Psalm is appropriate to begin the Book of Psalms because its theme and final statement is one of the major themes of the Book of Psalms: God’s guidance and blessing of the righteous versus the eventual destruction of the wicked.

Lord, make us righteous and keep us from the influence of the wicked. Instill in us delight for Your law; inspire us to meditate on it day and night. Plant us in fertile ground that we may yield an abundant crop for Your glory, through the power of Jesus’ name, Amen.



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Our Affliction Temporary

"Whatever afflictions may befall us here, they will not last long, but will soon be swallowed up in the greater joys or sorrows of the eternal world. These tears will not always flow; these sighs will not always heave our breasts. We can sigh no longer than the vital breath inspires our lungs; and we can weep no longer than till death stops all the fountains of our tears; and that will be in a very little time. And when we enter into the eternal world, if we have been the dutiful children of God here, His own gentle hand shall wipe away every tear from our faces, and He will comfort the mourners. Then all the sorrows of life will cease forever, and no more painful remembrance of them will remain than of the pains and sickness of our unconscious infancy..."

-- Samuel Davies (1724-1761)

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