

A Meditation on Psalms 1:1–2

[1] Blessed is the man that walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor standeth in the way of sinners, nor sitteth in the seat of the scornful.

[2] But his delight is in the law of the LORD; and in his law doth he meditate day and night. (Psalms 1:1–2)

Ἐποὺ θεοῦ



HE Bible is a key to salvation. Psalms is a key to the Bible.¹ Psalm 1, a proem, is a key to Psalms;² and its key verses 1 and 2.³ Careful study and meditation on these verses therefore profits us greatly.

[1] *Blessed is the man*

In the Septuagint, the Greek word translated as Blessed is *makarios*, which means either blessed or happy; both are understood to apply here.

Also, consider that when one feels especially blessed, with this is much joy. We may therefore read here, "this man is blessed, happy, joyful, and lacks nothing." Such, then, is our goal.

After the goal is stated, we are warned of three principal obstacles. These are three categories of mental error — which, as we will see, correspond to Plato's three divisions of the human soul. (*Republic* 4.434d–4.445e, 9.588b–9.591e; *Phaedrus* 246a–e; 253c–256c)

¹ Origen, [The Philocalia, 2.3](#) (G. Lewis, tr., 1911, p. 32); St. Basil, [Homilies on the Psalms](#), 10.1 (A. Way, tr., 1963, Fathers of the Church 46:151–152).

² St. Jerome. [The Homilies of Saint Jerome](#). Vol. 1. Homily 1 (M. Ewald, tr., 1964, Fathers of the Church 48, p. 3).

³ St. Basil, [Homilies on the Psalms, 10.3](#) (A. Way, tr., 1963, Fathers of the Church 46:154–155).

that walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly,

Counsel of the ungodly aptly describes the principal sin to which the *rational* or logical division of our mind (Plato's *logistikon*) is vulnerable. This, our faculty of discursive reasoning, is prone to entertain innumerable schemes, plans, anxieties, and similar vain thoughts. Some such thoughts involve positive projects we imagine; some concern needless fears and anxieties; some, of guilt and remorse. All such ruminations are almost always baseless and imaginary. Attention to ones thoughts will reveal the seriousness of this problem: one can seldom go a minute, or even a few seconds, without ungodly counsel.

The word *walketh* is appropriate here, because once one accepts the initial impulse to follow such thoughts, they lead the mind — for minutes or even hours — on a journey; yet they lead nowhere, or certainly nowhere good.

nor standeth in the way of sinners,

The *way of sinners* refers to mental errors of the concupiscent nature, or what Plato called *epithymia* (or the *epithymetikon*). These are temptations to inordinate or untimely sensory pleasures, such as over- or improper indulgence in food, drink, sex, etc.

It is called standing, because such temptations characteristically assault us when we are, so to speak, mentally stationary — that is, not actively applying our minds in ways connected with our spiritual development, helping others, or attending to productive tasks. "An idle mind," it is said, "is the devil's workshop."

nor sitteth in the seat of the scornful.

No less problematic (and, for religious people, often more so) are mental errors of our irascible and honor-seeking nature — what Plato called *thymos* (or our *thymoeides*). A principal form of such temptations is ones tendency to judge, condemn, or criticize others. Hence this is like a seat upon which one sits and presumes to pass judgment.

Again, by observing the thoughts one may easily see this strong, chronic tendency to find fault with people and things, and, in short, to think negatively.

[2] *But his delight is in the law of the LORD;*

We are next told that the blessed man is one who delights *in the law of the LORD*.

Here the *law of the Lord* must not be mistakenly understood as meaning written rules, commandments, prohibitions, and so on. To orient ones life to codified rules is legalism. Legalism does not bring happiness.

Law (in Hebrew, *Torah*) here is properly understood as the promptings of the Holy Spirit which gently guide us to do God's will.

A parallel may be drawn here with the Chinese concept of *Dao*, which may be understood as the Universal Law that governs all things benignly and providentially. To follow this *Law* is to live in accord with Nature — a principle that has only positive connotations, and is never considered onerous or 'against ones grain.'

We are to gently follow God's will instead of willfully pursuing our own schemes and plans. For this to become a habit is the journey of a lifetime and a main task of salvation.

Ones *reconciliation to God's will* is the message of the entire Bible. In the Old Testament, it is expressed by Abraham's willingness to sacrifice his son, Isaac. In the New Testament, the entire life of Jesus, including his crucifixion and resurrection, epitomize the principle.

This condition is also called the Reign (or Reigning)⁴ and Kingdom of God in ones heart and soul. Indeed, this reconciliation of wills is the main ethical concern of all religion.

⁴ Uebersax, John S. [Thy Kingdom or Thy Kingship Come – What Does Basileia in the Lord's Prayer Mean?](http://catholicgnosis.wordpress.com) <catholicgnosis.wordpress.com>. July, 2014.

The Greek word translated as delight is *hedone*, which may also mean pleasure (hence our English word, hedonism). In this state, God's *Law* may be experienced as a delightful pleasure.

To achieve this state of reconciliation to God's will is not only to feel blessedness and delight, but it also joins two basic elements of ones nature: the pleasure-seeking and the duty-seeking. The two become one in purpose.

A practice to recommend is to repeat these verses silently, as wit a mantra. And, so, these guides always near, one may ask in succession of each thought that occurs: Is this ungodly counsel? The way of sinners? The scoffer's seat?

The bad thoughts being rejected, those remaining are more likely to accord with God's will.

We end here, for it is better to discover for oneself the deeper meanings of Scripture. A basic interpretative approach has been outlined [here](#); that, with what has been said elsewhere (Uebersax, 2012, 2014) is enough.

We may only mention one further promise of Psalm 1: the blessed man will be *like a tree planted by the rivers of water* (Psalm 1:3a). This can be understood as a restoration of the Tree of Life in Genesis 2:9.⁵

The Tree of Life also appears Revelation 22:1–2, in the very last chapter of the Bible. The whole saga of Scripture, then, concerns a journey from self-will and the fall into sin — whence the Tree of Life is lost — to its restoration, which is a restoration of our soul as a godly Garden of virtue and delight.

Thus we do not err when we say that within these few verses the Bible's entire message of salvation is epitomized. Wisdom is near for those who seek it, and for this we should be grateful.

⁵ The Tree of Life is watered by four rivers (Genesis 2:10–14).

References

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25 March 2015