

A SONG OF FOUNDATIONS

Psalm 1

Dr. George O. Wood

Psalm 1:1–6 (NIV)

“Blessed 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. But his delight is in the law of the LORD, and on his law he meditates day and night. 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. Not so the wicked! They are like chaff that the wind blows away. Therefore the wicked will not stand in the judgment, nor sinners in the assembly of the righteous. For the LORD watches over the way of the righteous, but the way of the wicked will perish.”

A song of foundations. My great concern is for God to help us build strong foundations. This psalm today speaks to us about building strong foundations in our life to bear the weight of responsibility in life that God thrusts upon us. The psalm is really divided in three divisions, three things that contrast. Verses 1–2 contrast two foundations. Verses 3–4, two results. And verses 5 and 6, two expectations.

I. We'll spend most of the time on the first two verses today: the foundations.

Beginning with the word “blessed.” “Blessed” is a word that is somewhat difficult to get a hold of. We use it widely. For me blessing in a scriptural sense indicates two things. It indicates God’s approval and with that it indicates self-approval. God’s approval on my life brings with it a resulting state of joy and contentment and peace. The term “blessed” indicates something of what happens when we sense God’s approval upon our lives and the state of joy and anticipation

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that happens in us as a consequence. That's why we can even say of this psalm, not only "blessed is the person who," but "Oh, the happiness of the person who..."

We realize in reading Psalm 1 that only Christ has fully ever kept its terms. Everyone else has fallen short. So there is the sense in this psalm that we stand in the righteousness of Christ and hear God saying, "Blessed is My Son who truly did not walk in the counsel of the wicked and who truly delighted in My law." But there is a further sense of this psalm that allows us to begin to enter into the privilege of being a Christ person and of taking the principles and putting them to practice in our own experience.

A. The first thing that we notice in the foundation that's talked of in verses 1–2 is the blessing that comes upon a person who avoids a negative example. "Blessed is the man who does not..." and then some things are described that this person does not do.

Actually verse 1 has a series of deceleration, the downward stages. You can trace it in these words—walk, counsel, wicked. Then the second level—stand, way, sinners. Then the third level—sit, seat, mockers. Each word as you trace it down becomes more extreme than the previous one.

For example, to "walk in the counsel of the wicked": to "walk" is a step-by-step process. It involves listening to people who want to shape our decisions but who are not shaping them in the way God would shape them. The wicked are not ogres. They're not people with horns on their head. That would destroy the meaning of the psalm if we're looking around for some person who is grossly wicked. The idea of "wicked" here is anyone who does not line up in God's straight line. Someone who wants us to plant our life or suggests we plant the direction of our life in a way that is different from the way God would have us to plant them. Even if the deviation is only small.

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The next one—stand, way, sinners. Luther said, “Here I stand, so help me God. I can do no other.” To stand therefore is to be rooted in a particular way. “To stand in the way of sinners” (verse 1) means that one has taken a confirmed position of agreement. Whereas before he has only been listening to the counsel of those who do not agree with God. Now here is a person who has taken a firm, decided stand to walk in a way of life that is not approved by God.

Then to “sit in the seat of the scoffer” is to actively participate in and promulgate that which is against God. It’s to be openly and actively hostile to God. This is the counsel we are given on a negative side.

I think if we’re to identify the counsel of the wicked or the counsel of sinners or the counsel of scoffers in our culture today it must begin with the frank recognition that the chief competition to the Christian faith in our culture is humanism. What things are some of the counsel of the ungodly that we face in our culture?

A naturalistic cosmology. “Cosmology” comes from the word “cosmos.” The study of the cosmos, the study of the universe. “Naturalistic” is a word that is opposed to the word “supernatural.” Therefore, a naturalistic cosmology in the religion of our time or the ideas of our age says that everything should be explained within the standpoint of nature. That we don’t look for a God outside the cosmos who has brought it all into being. Therefore, a naturalistic cosmology looks at the world and rules out everything that was supernatural that might have caused it to come into being. That’s starting premise number one.

Premise number two is an evolutionary humanity, the viewpoint that we are products of nature and that there is no survival after death.

A third premise of humanism is a rationalistic epistemology. “Epistemology” is a million-dollar word for a Greek term that means “study of knowledge.” How do we get our knowledge? On

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what do we base our decisions? What information do we regard as trustworthy and reliable? Is it what our parents tell us, what the church tells us, what our reason tells us, what feelings tell us?

A rationalistic epistemology says that in our way of thinking as human beings there is no room for God to speak by means of revelation. It is centering our knowledge and background of information on the basis that is only valid in light of what we as mankind know. Nothing comes in from the outside. No information breaks through from the outside. The rationalistic epistemologist would look at the Scripture and say this is simply a record that man thought about God and is not the authentic Word of God speaking to us.

The fourth standard is situational ethics, which hold that there is no absolute right or wrong, but that all ethics and morals are grounded in our experience and not anchored to an absolute within the nature of God. In contrast, we behave as Christians partly due to the fact that we look for a corresponding trait within the nature of God. It is in God's nature not to lie; therefore it is in our nature in becoming like Him not to lie as well.

These views prevail in our culture. All these things give counsel to people. There are things from popular magazines that Psalm 1 says is counsel of the wicked.

The base that you build upon, whether you start with God, whether you start with absolutes and moral rights and wrongs, determines the outcome of practical day-to-day decisions you make.

Today's philosophies include the idea of "Me first."

The "counsel of the scoffer" or the "seat" of the scoffer. The need for philosophy is perhaps best represented with a strong pro-abortion stand that's been taken by some. It's the third step downward.

The philosophy of "Me first" instead of "Let anyone who follows Christ deny himself." It's do it and get it and do it and get it now. Instead of "Lay up for yourselves treasure in heaven"

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(Matthew 6:20). And it's ultimately don't hurt anyone. If you do it don't hurt anyone. It's impossible to do moral wrong and not hurt anyone. Someone will be hurt.

The psalmist tells us in very clear language, "Don't walk in the counsel of the wicked or stand in the way of sinners or sit in the seat of scoffers" (1:1). Recognize ultimately where the philosophical base is then watch the practical decisions.

B. The positive example of right foundation is found in verse 2. "His delight is in the law of the Lord, and on His law he meditates day and night." Two steps upward.

Delight in God's revelation. That's one of the great things we have as a Christian. We can come to the Word of God and it can speak to us in beautiful ways. Perhaps God has spoken to you even this last week through His word. It's a wonderful thing to look at the law of God, the Word of God and take delight in it. I've been reading in Job this month. My soul has been delighting in a God who lets us be frank with Him. Job could really put it to God and God didn't strike him dead. God lets us ask Him questions. An adversity is not necessarily the result of my doing something wrong. Delighting in the law of God.

When we create something we have to have something to start with. We cannot make anything out of nothing. We must always have something to start with. But when God makes something He makes it out of nothing. My soul rejoices in serving a God who is that kind of creator. I use these as illustrations of how we can consciously delight in the Lord and His goodness and His greatness.

The Scripture says we're not only to "delight in the law of the Lord," but "on His law we meditate day and night." This doesn't mean that all the time we're thinking about the Word of God, every waking moment, but the Word of God is such that it keeps interfacing with our thoughts and our relationships and it keeps breaking in upon us. One of the great joys of growing

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Christians is the ability to use God's Word as a resource, to begin to know where things are and what God is saying to us through His Word. To meditate upon the law of the Lord.

This past week we had a long staff meeting working on the transition. We had about twenty-five things on the agenda that have to be done in respect to the transition. We'd gone through all these things and it seemed like we were drowned in a sea of details and responsibility and work. Somewhat discouraged to boot and yet encouraged by the long-range prospect but discouraged by the immediate responsibility ahead of us. As we closed I had the inspiration as we came to a time of prayer, "Let's pray to God as the God who helps people in transition and let's think of all the times God's people in the Scripture have been in transition and what God did for them and be encouraged by that." We had a marvelous season of prayer. Some of the things we thought of were like in the Exodus. It is God who initiates the move. And God who calls us to a promised land. Something that is better, that's why we go through all the inconvenience. It's God as well who makes sure we are tested in the wilderness so that our character and our faith is determined. There are going to be tests as we move in transition. I predict that we will have heavy downpour the first Sunday! But there are going to be tests and it's in the character of God to bring us through those tests. To challenge us with them. When you think of the awesome time of transition when Jesus was on the Mount of Olives ready to ascend and the disciples were going to have to get used to relating to Him in a whole new kind of way. Jesus said as a promise to His people in transition, "I leave you My presence and I leave you My power." To meditate in the law of God is to take the Scripture and apply it to what we're facing in our own experience. So we saw in reference to that, "Let the words of my mouth and the meditations of my heart be acceptable in Thy sight" (Psalm 19:14).

The two foundations—I told you that would be the greater part of the sermon.

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II. Let's look for a moment at the two results in verses 3 and 4.

A. The good result in verse 3 is being “a tree planted by streams of water.” The life that is walking in right counsel sinks in roots. God tells us that the whole key to a good life is having roots. If you don't have roots in your life spiritually then begin to grow some. Roots must have water to nourish them. The water of the Word. The water of experience with the body of Christ. The water of worship. The water of prayer. The water of giving. The water of stewardship. The water of involvement. The water of witness. That water coming into our life with roots produces fruit—joy and peace and gentleness, goodness, kindness, self-control, meekness. An unwithered leaf, an attractiveness about one's lifestyle. Christians' faces ought not to look like shriveled fruit. But the leaf ought to be unwithered. A radiant kind of way of looking at life.

B. For those who do not follow God's counsel, verse 4 tells us of the consequence: The useless life. Not productive. The wicked. “They are like chaff that the wind blows away.” Chaff. You'd think that the psalmist would have taken a good tree and then illustrated the wicked with a bad tree. Instead he changes the metaphors altogether and switches from the good tree to chaff.

What is chaff? If you live in city culture you may never have seen chaff. The only time I've seen chaff was when I was a kid on the missionary field in China. The women had a real flat basket and they'd put grain in the basket that had just been harvested. They'd wait for a wind to come along and then they'd start throwing it up in the air. The heavy grain would fall back in the basket and the wind would drive all the flaky stuff away. That's the chaff.

So the Scripture is saying here all the flakiness of life, the chaff, will be blown away. Only what's solid and planted in God will survive.

III. Then verses 5 and 6 lead us to two expectations.

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A. Those without God do not have a happy expectation at all. “Therefore the wicked will not stand in the judgment, nor sinners in the assembly of the righteous” (verse 5). If there is a doctrine that is unpopular and hated in our day it is the doctrine of accountability to God as the Scripture so clearly teaches. You and I have a personal appointment with God. Some day you will stand before God and some day I will stand before God. Paul says we will all appear before the judgment seat of Christ. Rather than fearing that accountability we ought to reckon that date with God as one that is important because through Christ we’ve already passed. Now we simply stand before Him to give an account for what we have done as a Christian, our eternal fate is not in the balance as those who do not know Christ.

Accountability is a wonderful thing. I think of a particular person I know who is not accountable to anyone. This person’s personality keeps growing extremes that are ungodly. Developments of life that could be so easily corrected if this person had to be accountable to someone. God says, “I want you to be accountable to Me.” Scriptures also teach us about being accountable to one another. Those without God have an unhappy end. Those with God, the Scripture says, “The LORD watches over the way of the righteous but the way of the wicked will perish” (Psalm 1:6). The way of the wicked is sort of like a road that suddenly drops off.

B. But it says he watches over the way of the righteous. How does the Lord watch over the way of the righteous? Does God watch over us with binoculars? Or is it the kind of watching that some of you fathers do with younger children who are just learning to ride a bicycle? That’s how the Lord watches us. He’s right there to steady us when we’re about to fall. To pick us up when we have fallen.

This psalm speaks appropriately to us. It calls us to build life on the right foundations. It calls us as a congregation to lay the kinds of principles that are right and in God. It calls us then to expect

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certain results from the foundations we lay and expectations which arise from the results. The Lord watches over the way of the righteous to protect.

Closing Prayer

We think, Lord, of Your words, "I will never leave you nor forsake you." We think also of the story You told like Psalm 1 of the two builders. One who built upon the rock and the other on the sand. Ultimate testing proved the value of the house that was built. May it be, oh God, that each one here today has chosen to build their life upon You, the Rock. When the end comes they will be found kept in You, nourished by Your water of life. For us all, Lord, we are assaulted on sensory overload with the information we are getting from our culture. A great deal of it coming from a lifestyle and life viewpoint that assumes You do not exist, assumes we are simply animals on the road of evolution. Assumes that everything is all right as long as you feel good about it. Help us in a kindly way to stand firm in You against these assaults on our life and soul. Help us to seek Your face, to hear from You through Your Word and in prayer and through other believers and through teaching what is Your mind for us that we may stand in You. There have been times this last week when we have listened to the seductive siren call of this world. We bring that now to mind and we lay it before You and we ask Your forgiveness for it and we repent over it. We ask again for the righteousness of Jesus Christ to be applied to our lives. That indeed we might be that good tree firmly fixed in You. We ask these things, Lord, in Your name. Amen.