

Scripture Studies

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

Old Testament Study:	
Genesis 1:26-2:3.....	3
<i>The Sixth Day: In His Image; The Seventh Day: Rest;</i>	
<i>The Creation and the New Creation</i>	
A Study of Exhortation:	
Romans 12:3.....	8
<i>Sober Judgment</i>	
New Testament Study:	
James 1:16-21.....	11
<i>Every Good and Perfect Gift; Self-Control</i>	
A Study in Psalms:	
Psalms 3.....	16
<i>Deliverance at the Hand of the Lord</i>	
For Reflection:	
The Coming Day, by John Oxenham.....	22

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May God bless you as you study His Word.



Old Testament Study: Genesis 1:26-2:3

The Sixth Day: In His Image

²⁶Then God said, "Let us make man in our image, in our likeness, and let them rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air, over the livestock, over all the earth, and over all the creatures that move along the ground."

²⁷So God created man in His own image, in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them.

²⁸God blessed them and said to them, "Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air and over every living creature that moves on the ground."

²⁹Then God said, "I give you every seed-bearing plant on the face of the whole earth and every tree that has fruit with seed in it. They will be yours for food. ³⁰And to all the beasts of the earth and all the birds of the air and all the creatures that move on the ground—everything that has the breath of life in it—I give every green plant for food." And it was so.

³¹God saw all that He had made, and it was very good. And there was evening, and there was morning—the sixth day.

Here we have the creation of man. Immediately we see that man is set apart from the rest of creation, even in the manner in which he was created. The words "**us**", "**our**", and "**our**" in verse 26 emphasize the role of all three persons of the Trinity in the creation of man. Note that there are three occurrences (three suggesting the Trinity) of the plural pronouns in verse 26. Also, in verse 27, we have what sounds like triple-talk, where it says "**God created**" then "**He created**" then again "**He created**". This again, I believe, is a subtle reference to the three persons of the Trinity and their explicit involvement in the creation of man. So, whereas the other creatures are depicted as being made by the command of God, man is set apart by being depicted as being made through the counsel of the Trinity.

Man is also set apart from the rest of creation because he is made in God's image and likeness. In what ways are we created in God's image?:

1. We are a spiritual beings. Paul says, "**...we are God's off-**

spring” (Acts 17:29) and the writer of Hebrews says that God is **“the Father of our spirits”** (Heb. 12:9). So, just as bodily we are born in the image and likeness of our human fathers, so, spiritually, we are born of the image and likeness of our spiritual Father. As such, we are unique among the creatures in that, as spiritual beings, we are able to commune with God through our spiritual nature. This constitutes one of the greatest privileges God has bestowed upon mankind.

2. We are reasoning, knowledgeable beings. Our reasoning ability clearly sets us apart from the rest of the creatures. Through it, man has acquired knowledge and understanding of the universe that far surpasses that of any other creature. In addition to this, before the fall we apparently had an intimate knowledge of God and the things of God that we have lost since the fall of man. However, those of us who are born of God are being **“renewed in knowledge in the image”** of our Creator (Col. 3:10).

3. We are moral creatures, created to be righteous and holy. No other creature makes decisions based on moral considerations. We, however, are expected to. When God forbade Adam to eat from the tree of knowledge, God was expecting Adam overcome his fleshly desires and make a decision based on morality, on the command of God. Despite the fact that Adam failed, we are still to some extent moral creatures, though imperfect ones. Again, those of us who are born of God are created, in our new selves, **“to be like God in true righteousness and holiness”** (Eph. 4:24).

Notice that after the fall, to a certain extent, man lost each of these God-like traits. Our spirituality was corrupted so that, instead of communing with God, we commune with the devil. Our knowledge of God and the things of God was lost such that we must, when we are born of God, strive to renew that knowledge. Our righteousness was tainted such that our fleshly desires overrule moral considerations. Yet, in all these things, the child of God is being renewed to the true image of God originally bestowed upon Adam: **“Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day”** (II Cor. 4:16).

In verse 28, man was given dominion over the other creatures. Because he was created in the likeness of God, man was given the ability through his wisdom and knowledge to have dominion over the rest of creation. The obvious fact that man has dominion over all creatures is a testimony to the fact that man occupies a special place in God’s creation. No other creature uses other creatures as beasts of burden; no other creature has the ability to tame other creatures; indeed, no other creature chooses to protect creatures of different species. Only man is given the knowledge and the responsibility to rule over other creatures.

In verses 29 and 30, man and animals are given plants for food. Originally, all were vegetarians, man and animal. Before the fall of man, there was no death, so, necessarily, all were vegetarians. After the fall,

during the time of Noah, man was allowed by God to eat meat: **“Everything that lives and moves will be food for you. Just as I gave you the green plants, I now give you everything”** (Gen. 9:3). In the new earth, during the reign of Christ, all again will be vegetarian because there again will be no death: **“The wolf and the lamb will feed together, and the lion will eat straw like the ox”** (Isa. 65:25).

God ends the sixth day by again declaring that the creation of man was special. He pronounces the work He had done on the sixth day as **“very good”**.

The Seventh Day: Rest

^{2:1}Thus, the heavens and the earth were completed in all their vast array.

^{2:2}By the seventh day God had finished the work He had been doing; so on the seventh day He rested from all His work. ^{2:3}And God blessed the seventh day and made it holy, because on it He rested from all the work of creating that He had done.

And so, God **“completed”** His great work of creation. He commemorated the completion of the creation by resting and establishing a Sabbath rest for His people. In the section of Exodus containing the ten commandments, Moses says: **“For in six days the LORD made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that is in them, but he rested on the seventh day. Therefore, the LORD blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy”** (Ex. 20:11). So, we see that one reason God created the heavens and the earth in six days, and then rested on the seventh, was to provide a model for us to follow as we perform our work. God, of course, did not need rest, but we do. That is why Jesus said, **“The Sabbath is made for man, not man for the Sabbath”** (Mark 2:27).

More importantly, the Sabbath rest is a symbol of and is fulfilled by the rest we receive when we rest in Christ. The writer of Hebrews says, **“There remains, then, a Sabbath-rest for the people of God, for anyone who enters God’s rest also rests from his own work, just as God did from his”** (Heb. 4:9-10). And how do we enter God’s rest?: **“Now we who have believed enter that rest”** (Heb. 4:3) and Jesus says, **“Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls”** (Matt. 11:29). We who have entered God’s rest through Christ are no longer bound by the law of the Sabbath, because we rest in Him always. Thus, Paul says: **“Therefore do not let anyone judge you by what you eat or drink, or with regard to a religious festival, a New Moon celebration or a Sabbath day. These are a shadow of the things that were to come; the reality,**

however, is found in Christ.” (Col. 2:16-17).

Praise the Lord for the rest we find in Him. Though our bodies toil and sweat, we can rest in Him!

The Creation and the New Creation

In II Corinthians, Paul says: **“Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!”** (II Cor. 5:17). Since we are God’s new creation, it should not surprise us, then, if there are parallels between the seven days of the creation of the universe and the phases of our development into a new creation. The similarities are intriguing:

1. **The First Day: Light**—The first day of the creation is characterized by the light of God shining forth. The first step in our development into a new creation is to see the light of Jesus Christ. Jesus said, **“I am the light of the world”** (John 8:12). Therefore, just as God provided the light to the creation on the first day, so Christ provides the light to us, the new creation.

2. **The Second Day: Separation from God**—The second day is characterized by separation from God. The waters above the earth separated the earth from God. So, to be a new creation, we must realize that we are separated from God by our sin. Isaiah warned Israel: **“Surely the arm of the LORD is not too short to save, nor his ear too dull to hear. But your iniquities have separated you from your God”** (Isa. 59:1-2). Job realized this as he pleaded: **“If only there were someone to arbitrate between us, to lay his hand upon us both, someone to remove God’s rod from me”** (Job 9:33-34). And Paul relates: **“Once you were alienated from God and were enemies in your minds because of your evil behavior”** (Col. 1:21).

3. **The Third Day: New Life**—The third day of creation is characterized by new life. The first life-forms, the plants, were created on the third day. Throughout the Bible, the third day symbolizes the day of new life: Jesus, of course, rose on the third day; Jonah was released from the whale’s belly on the third day; Paul received his sight back on the third day; etc. So, after seeing the light of Christ and recognizing that our sin separates us from God (and thus, recognizing our need for God), the way is opened for us to obtain new life in Christ by accepting Him as our Lord and Savior. As Paul says, **“We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life”** (Rom. 6:4).

4. **The Fourth Day: The Light-Bearers**—On the fourth day, God created the light-bearers: the sun, moon and stars. So also, after we have

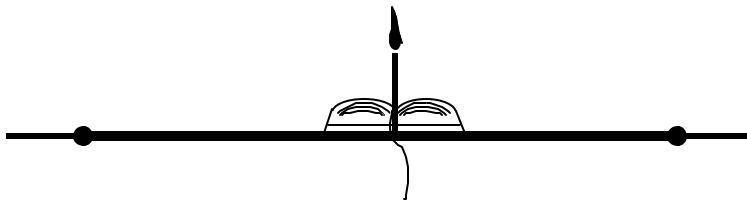
received new life, we become light-bearers for God. Just as God was the original source of light for His creation and then He created light-bearers, so also Christ said that He Himself was the **“light of the world”** (John 8:12) and then told us that we are the **“light of the world”** (Matt. 5:14). Thus, again, the originator of the light creates the light-bearers.

5. **The Fifth Day: The Filling of the Creation**—The fifth day is characterized by the filling of the creation. On it, the Lord commands the waters to teem with fish and birds to fill the air. So, the next step in the development of the new creation is to become filled with the Holy Spirit. Paul exhorts: **“Do not get drunk on wine, which leads to debauchery. Instead, be filled with the Spirit”** (Eph. 5:18).

6. **The Sixth Day: In His Image**—The sixth day is characterized by man being created in the image of God. So also we, day by day, are being conformed to the likeness of Christ. Paul says, **“For those God foreknew He also predestined to be conformed to the likeness of His Son”** (Rom. 8:29). Paul also says that we **“are being transformed into Christ’s likeness with ever-increasing glory”** (II Cor. 3:18) and then that Christ **“will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body”** (Phil. 3:21).

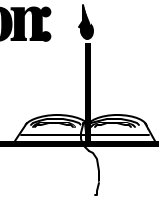
7. **The Seventh Day: Rest**—The seventh day, of course, is characterized by rest. As was pointed out before, the Sabbath rest points to the rest we receive in Christ. **“There remains, then, a Sabbath-rest for the people of God, for anyone who enters God’s rest also rests from his own work, just as God did from His”** (Heb. 4:9-10).

Lord, Almighty Creator, we praise You for Your creation, not only for the creation of the universe, but also for the new creation of us in Christ. May we be light-bearers for You in this dark world; may we be filled with the Holy Spirit just as the seas teem with creatures; may we be conformed to Your likeness and live our lives in the image of Christ; may we rest in You even as we toil on earth, until we come into Your perfect rest on that day when we will stand before You in glory. By the power of Jesus Christ may your new creation glorify You. Amen.



A Study of Exhortation

Romans 12:3



Sober Judgment

³For by the grace given me I say to every one of you: Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought, but rather think of yourself with sober judgment, in accordance with the measure of faith God has given you.

The first two exhortations in Romans 12, verses 1 and 2, concerned the Christian's relationship to God. This exhortation, and the ones in subsequent verses, concern the Christian's relationship to other Christians, as we all form the Body of Christ. These exhortations deal with principles for being successful as a Body in doing the work of God. Specifically, in this verse, Paul exhorts believers to have a correct view of themselves and to determine what gifts God desires them to use in serving Him.

In the first verse of Romans, Paul made an appeal by **"urging"** the Romans to offer themselves as a living sacrifices. In the second verse, he commanded them (by the words **"do not"**) not to be conformed to the world. In this verse, he gives them an exhortation using his authority as an apostle by saying **"by the grace given me"**. This reflects how important Paul considers this exhortation. Paul took his role as an apostle seriously because by it, he had the authority to exhort and instruct his fellow believers.

Note that Paul is speaking to **"every one"**. This exhortation applies to **"every one"** because each person is given spiritual gifts to use in the work of God; thus, it is necessary that each person examine himself **"with sober judgment"** in order to determine the gifts and the level of service God desires for his life. Also, this exhortation applies to **"every one"** because we all tend to have an incorrect view of ourselves; thus, it is necessary that each person examine himself **"with sober judgment"** in order to get a correct view of himself. Either we view ourselves too modestly, so that do not live up to our potential; or we view ourselves too proudly, so that we see ourselves as having gifts that we do not have.

Most often, we view ourselves too proudly, thus, Paul says: **"Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought"**. God hates pride: **"God**

opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble” (I Pet. 4:5). Pride is sin: **“Haughty eyes and a proud heart, the lamp of the wicked, are sin!”** (Prov. 21:4). God often warns against it in His Word: **“When pride comes, then comes disgrace, but with humility comes wisdom”** (Prov. 11:2); **“Pride goes before destruction, a haughty spirit before a fall”** (Prov. 21:4); etc. Perhaps the reason the God hates pride so much is that pride was at the root of Satan’s fall. Isaiah relates the thoughts of Satan before His fall: **“I will ascend to heaven; I will raise my throne above the stars of God; I will sit enthroned on the mount of assembly, on the utmost heights of the sacred mountain. I will ascend above the tops of the clouds; I will make myself like the Most High”** (Isa. 14:13-15).

In order to battle pride and to develop a correct view of ourselves, we must be able to, in a sense, step out of ourselves and view ourselves objectively. As Paul puts it: **“Think of yourself with sober judgment”**. Now, it is difficult to think of ourselves **“with sober judgment”** unless the exhortation in Romans 12:2 has been followed. Paul, in Romans 12:2, exhorts us not to be conformed to the world. The way of the world is to exalt oneself. The way of the world is to say “I can do anything I want!”. The way of the world is to strive to be number one. This is not the way of God. God has a method of service for you in accordance with His perfect plan for all. His method of service for you may be very visible, full of glory, impacting the lives of many; or it may be very humble, reaching only a few. He may have you serve Him in the grandest pulpit, or in the tiniest prayer closet. **“Does not the potter have the right to make out of the same lump of clay some pottery for noble purposes and some for common use?”** (Rom. 9:21). Whatever the case may be, the important thing is to find the method of service God has chosen for you specifically. It is not the accolades of the world that count, but the approval of God.

So, the purpose of the **“sober judgment”** is to look at oneself objectively, discerning specifically the service that God has prepared for you. It is of the greatest importance, in order that the Body of Christ be healthy, to follow the will of the Head of the Body, that is Christ, in your service. How has He prepared you? What specific talents and strengths has He given you to aid in your service? Realize that since the talents are from God, the desire to carry out the service will come from God, the opportunity to perform the service will come from God, and the energy to perform the service will come from God.

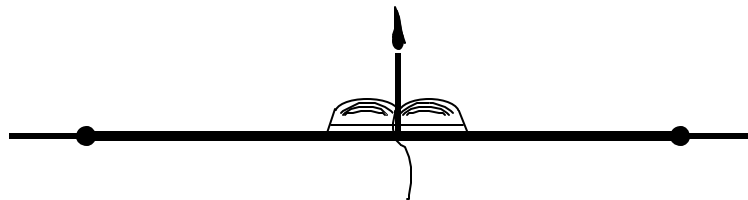
The result of the **“sober judgment”** will be a knowledge of the service God has prepared for you and a correct estimation of your ability to perform that service. **“Sober judgment”** will necessarily result in humil-

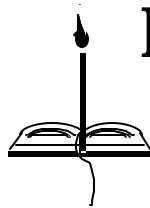
ity, because a correct view of oneself will result in the realization that all of our talents and abilities come from God. We would be nothing without Him. Our service would mean nothing without Him. **“For from Him and through Him and to Him are all things. To Him be the glory forever! Amen”** (Rom. 11:36).

Paul relates that the sober judgment should be **“in accordance with the measure of faith God has given you”**. To err on the side of modesty is just as wrong (albeit less likely) as to err on the side of pride. We must be careful not to deny the true gifts God has given us. If God has given us a **“measure of faith”** along with the talents and abilities to serve Him in some way, we must use these true gifts with confidence for His glory. Do not allow false humility to be an excuse for laziness!

Note that it is the measure of faith God has given **“you”**. As Paul says, **“We have different gifts”** (Rom. 12:6). Some, often with good motives, may coerce you into service that God has not prepared for you. Not all are meant to be street evangelists, not all are meant to go to other countries as missionaries, not all are meant to be pastors, etc. God has prepared each of us for specific methods of service. If we serve in ways for which God has not prepared us, this takes away from the amount of time we can serve Him in the ways for which He has prepared us. Be careful not to get sidetracked and coerced into areas of service for which you know that you are not prepared. Instead, always seek God to find out His perfect plan for you.

Now, Father, we praise You that we have the privilege of serving You. What an honor it is to personally serve the Creator of the universe! Prepare us, guide us, make the way for us and give us the strength to perform the service that will best contribute to keep the Body of Christ healthy. By Your Spirit, give us the ability to view ourselves with sober judgment; by Your Spirit, always make us aware that we and our service are nothing without You and Your guidance. We ask these things in the name of Jesus, Amen.





New Testament Study: James 1:16-21

Every Good and Perfect Gift

¹⁶Don't be deceived, my dear brothers. ¹⁷Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights, who does not change like shifting shadows. ¹⁸He chose to give us birth through the word of truth, that we might be a kind of firstfruits of all He created.

In the previous verses, James pointed out the error of those who make God the author of sin. Here, James expands on that, saying that **“every good and perfect gift”** is from God.

He warns us not to **“be deceived”** concerning the nature of God. We should all strive to have the correct understanding concerning the nature of God. Many times, we err because we project on God the fallen nature of man. We attribute to God the same motives for doing things that man's fallen nature has. But we must not be deceived. God is the author of all that is good. The best way to understand the true nature of God is through the study of the word of God, especially the life of Jesus. Jesus' life is, in effect, the nature of God put into human terms. Jesus said, **“Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father”** (John 14:9).

James makes a sweeping statement that **“every good and perfect gift”** is from God. In other words, all good is from Him. Thus, if we want a **“good”** life, we should turn to Him for it. The most precious of the **“good and perfect”** gifts that we have received from Him is **“eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord”** (Rom. 6:23).

The gifts come from the **“Father of heavenly lights”**, meaning, of course, God. **“Light”** in the Bible is a symbol of purity and righteousness. **“God is light; in Him there is no darkness at all”** (I John 1:5). In fact, since God is pure **“light”** (i.e. holy), He **“lives in unapproachable light, whom no one has seen or can see”** (I Tim. 6:16). The fact that **“God is light”** explains why the ungodly hate Him: **“Light has come into the world, but men loved darkness instead of light because their deeds were evil. Everyone who does evil hates the light, and will not come into the light for fear that his deeds will be exposed”** (John 3:19-20). Since we are his children, our lives should reflect the fact that **“God is light”**: **“For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the**

Lord. Live as children of light" (Eph. 5:8).

Although God is **"the Father of heavenly lights"**, He **"does not change like shifting shadows"**. We may get the incorrect idea that, since the creation is ever-changing, God also changes. This is not true. The Psalmist says, in speaking to God about the heavens and the earth: **"They will perish, but you remain; they will all wear out like a garment. Like clothing you will change them and they will be discarded. But you remain the same, and your years will never end"** (Ps. 102:26-27). The Lord Himself says, in no uncertain terms: **"I the Lord do not change"** (Mal. 3:6).

Some people have the understanding that the God of the Old Testament is different in nature than the God of the New Testament. This is not true, as borne out by the verses cited above. We must be careful not to misinterpret the unveiling of God's plan as the changing of God's nature. It was necessary that God deal with Israel through the law so that we would understand and fully appreciate God's dealing with us through grace. Some would say that the God of the Old Testament is a God of judgment and the God of the New Testament is a God of mercy. However, the Old Testament shows that God was abundantly merciful and longsuffering toward Israel and the New Testament shows that God will judge the world with a full measure of His wrath at the end of this age. God's nature is consistent throughout the Bible.

So, God does not change. We, however, are fickle and inconsistent. Sometimes, we trust in Him, serve Him and are bold for Him; sometimes, we lose heart, follow our own desires and deny Him. The more inconsistent we are, the less like God we are. In your inconsistency, go to Him; make your foundation the solid, unchanging Rock, on whom you can depend.

In verse 18, James describes the best and most perfect of the gifts that we have received: our new birth. Note that God **"chose"** to give us new birth. He was not forced to give us new birth; He did not need to give us new birth; we did nothing to merit it such that He was obliged to give us new birth.

Note that it is **"new birth"** that He has given us. He did not mend our old selves, but He created us anew. As Paul says: **"Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!"** (II Cor. 5:17). Note also that a **"new birth"** implies a changed life and a fresh existence.

Our new birth comes **"through the word of truth"**, which is the gospel. We cannot receive the new birth by obeying the law; we can only receive it through faith in Christ, who died for us so that the **"righteous requirements of the law might be fully met in us"** (Rom. 8:4). Just as, typologically, Moses brought the Israelites to the border of the promised

land but could not bring them in, and then Joshua led the Israelites into the promised land; so also, the law brings us to the place where we realize our need for a new birth, and the new birth comes through Jesus (the Greek form of the Hebrew name "Joshua").

Next, James states the purpose of our new birth: **"that we might be a kind of firstfruits of all He created"**. The **"firstfruits"** was an offering of the first grain of the harvest in recognition of God's goodness and provision (see Lev. 23:9ff; Lev. 2; Lev. 6:14-23). Interestingly, the feast of firstfruits was not offered until the Israelites entered the promised land. So, after our new birth, we are to offer ourselves as **"living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God"** (Rom. 12:1), in recognition of His goodness in providing us with a new life.

Self-Control

¹⁹My dear brothers, take note of this: Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry, ²⁰for man's anger does not bring about the righteous life that God desires. ²¹Therefore, get rid of all moral filth and the evil that is so prevalent, and humbly accept the word planted in you, which can save you.

James begins this section of his epistle with three exhortations: **"Be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry."** Since the next section of this epistle predominantly concerns the Christian's response to the Word of God, it appears that James desired that we apply these exhortations also to the Christian's response to the Word of God (even though the exhortations could apply to many aspects of our lives).

With this in mind, we see that by exhorting us to **"be quick to listen"**, James is urging us to have a teachable spirit, ready to receive instruction from the Word of God. We should be eager to listen to the Word, always with a mind for applying it to our lives. We all need teaching from the Word, continually until the end of our existence on earth. It seems that some Christians that have known the Lord for a long time think that they have heard it all. They stop going to Bible studies and even stop studying the Word themselves because they think they "know it all". Perish the thought! The depth of the Word of God is immense. Diligently study the Word until you meet the Lord and you will be continually blessed.

By exhorting us to **"be slow to speak"**, James is urging us not to rashly blurt out opinions concerning the Word of God without careful study. We must be careful in what we say, especially concerning God's Word, so as not to misrepresent it. We should be as Moses who, when asked a question concerning the law to which he did not know the answer,

said: **“Wait until I find out what the LORD commands concerning you”** (Num. 9:8). When Moses did not know the answer, he waited for the clear Word of the Lord. So also, when asked a question about God’s Word to which we do not know the answer, rather than giving an answer that we are not certain is correct, we should say: “I don’t know, let me seek the Lord on that issue.”

By exhorting us to be **“slow to become angry”**, James is urging us to be patient with those who disagree with us concerning the Word of God. This behavior should characterize discussions concerning the Word of God. Christians should not be involved in heated arguments; rather, they should humbly, respectfully present their opinions, without forgetting to humbly, respectfully listen to the others’ opinions.

These exhortations are tightly related. When one is **“quick to listen”**, he cannot help but be **“slow to speak”**. Also, being **“quick to listen”** aids in being **“slow to become angry”**. Anger is often caused by a misunderstanding of the other person’s viewpoint. Being **“quick to listen”** will decrease the possibility of such a misunderstanding. Moreover, not being **“slow to speak”** often causes anger. When participants in a discussion are not slow to speak, they must speak more loudly in order to make their point. Thus, the volume grows until the speakers become shouters. How often does a friendly conversation grow into a full-blown argument due to too much talking and not enough listening?

As James says: **“Man’s anger does not bring about the righteous life that God desires.”** Anger and Christianity are incompatible. Christianity is founded upon the blood of Christ and His sacrifice on the cross. He did not go to the cross in anger but humility and submission. As Peter points out: **“When they hurled their insults at Him, He did not retaliate; when He suffered, He made no threats”** (I Pet. 2:23). It is difficult for you to preach grace, convey grace, and convince others of God’s grace while you are angry.

Many, for some reason, think that anger will bring about righteousness. There are many problems with this, among them:

1. Anger turns people off. Rather than bringing people to repentance, it often causes a backlash of behavior in rebellion to the anger.
2. Anger blinds one’s own mind to true righteousness. In your anger, you may veer from the course of righteousness, and not even realize it.
3. Anger is a foothold of Satan: **“Do not let the sun go down while you are still angry, and do not give the devil a foothold”** (Eph. 4:26-27). Satan takes advantage of inflamed passion, even so-called “righteous anger”.
4. Anger is, in effect, spiritual murder. As Christ said: **“You have heard that it was said to the people long ago, ‘Do not murder, and**

anyone who murders will be subject to judgment.’ But I tell you that anyone who is angry with his brother will be subject to judgment” (Matt. 5:21-22).

Indeed, there is a great contrast between man’s anger and God’s righteousness.

James goes on to say: **“Therefore, get rid of all moral filth and the evil that is so prevalent, and humbly accept the word planted in you, which can save you”** (vs. 21). By saying **“therefore”**, he ties this exhortation to the previous one. In effect he is saying that the **“moral filth”** and **“evil”** in our lives cause us not to be **“quick to listen”**, **“slow to speak”**, and **“slow to become angry”**.

The Christian, in order to be teachable and not deaf to the Word, must **“get rid of all moral filth”** in his life. He must not speak filthily; he must not read filthy books or magazines; he must not watch filthy movies or television programs; he must not listen to music with filthy lyrics; etc. For the child of God, these things should be an abomination. The true child of God should not enjoy filthy things. Why are we willing to watch and read things that our ancestors would have been ashamed to watch and read?

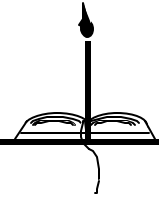
To get rid of the filth in one’s life requires the help of the Holy Spirit, especially in today’s society where filth is, indeed, so **“prevalent”**. Be careful, its prevalence can make you numb to its evil. Prevalence does not make filth harmless or allowable. Filth is filth, regardless of the standards of society. Pray that the Holy Spirit would help you to have the right attitude about filth. Pray that filth would be detestable to your spirit. Pray that the Holy Spirit would give you the moral strength to cleanse the filth from your life.

Getting rid of filth in one’s life is necessary preparation to **“humbly accept the word”**. Filth and evil in our lives often cause us, in order to rationalize our behavior, to reinterpret God’s Word, rather than to **“accept”** His Word. Filth and evil in our lives cause us to say things like, “Well, God didn’t really mean that; it was a cultural commandment.”

As James goes on to say, humbly accepting the Word **“can save you”**. For the non-believer, accepting the Word can save their souls from destruction. For the believer, accepting the Word can save their lives from the destruction that filth and sin wreaks. Even in the lives of Christians, we see the destruction that comes from rejecting the Word. We see filth and sin destroying relationships, destroying marriages, destroying ministries, etc. Salvation from these things is available by humbly accepting the Word. Seek salvation! Accept the Word!



A Study in Psalms: Psalm 3



Psalm 3 – Deliverance at the Hand of the Lord

A psalm of David.
When he fled from his son Absalom.

¹O LORD, how many are my foes!
How many rise up against me!

²Many are saying of me,
“God will not deliver him.” *Selah*

³But You are a shield around me, O LORD,
You bestow glory on me and lift up my head,

⁴To the LORD I cry aloud,
and He answers me from His holy hill. *Selah*

⁵I lie down and sleep;
I wake again, because the LORD sustains me.

⁶I will not fear the tens of thousands
drawn up against me on every side.

⁷Arise, O LORD!
Deliver me, O my God!
For You have struck all my enemies on the jaw.

⁸From the LORD comes deliverance.
May your blessing be on Your people.
Selah

Psalm 3 depicts how David’s view of a troubled situation went from hopelessness to confidence: hopelessness when he had his eyes focused on his situation; confidence when he considered the Lord’s hand in the situation.

As the inscription of the Psalm says, this Psalm of David concerns the time **“when he fled from his son Absalom”**. This episode in David’s life is found in II Sam. 15. During David’s reign over Israel, his son Absalom gathered a following by “bad-mouthing” David. Even some of David’s most trusted aids joined Absalom’s camp (II Sam. 15:12). Absalom proclaimed himself king, and David was forced to flee Jerusalem.

This episode demonstrates that even the most renowned of God’s children face trials; yes, even heavy trials. Jesus prepared us for this: **“In this**

world you will have trouble” (John 16:33). The apostles in the book of Acts recognized this: **“We must go through many hardships to enter the kingdom of God”** (Acts 14:22). So we should not be surprised when we, as children of God, face affliction. As Peter says: **“Dear friends, do not be surprised at the painful trial you are suffering, as though something strange were happening to you. But rejoice that you participate in the sufferings of Christ, so that you may be overjoyed when His glory is revealed”** (I Pet. 4:12-13).

So, we find that, according to the Bible, affliction is normal for the saints. This contradicts much “teaching” in the pulpits. Some would say that, when one becomes a Christian, there will be no more adversity, no more trouble, no more hardships. This view is not supported in the Bible. Moreover, this view is dangerous. If one comes to Christ on the basis that their life will be affliction-less (a faulty basis), they will most likely fall away when affliction comes. Since their “conversion” was not based on truth, odds are that it was not a true conversion. People must be brought to Christ **“not with words of human wisdom, lest the cross of Christ be emptied of its power”** (I Cor. 1:17), but with the true gospel of Christ, that is, **“that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, that He was buried, that He was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures”** (I Cor. 15:3,4).

The affliction of David described in this Psalm was a punishment from God for his sin with Bathsheba. After Nathan confronted David concerning his sin, Nathan said: **“This is what the LORD says: ‘Out of your own household I am going to bring calamity upon you. Before your very eyes I will take your wives and give them to one who is close to you, and he will lie with your wives in broad daylight. You did it in secret, but I will do this thing in broad daylight before all Israel’”** (II Sam. 12:11,12). This prophecy was completely fulfilled when Absalom took David’s concubines: **“So they pitched a tent for Absalom on the roof, and he lay with his father’s concubines in the sight of all Israel”** (II Sam. 16:22).

We learn from this that the results of sin are far-reaching. Years had passed since David’s sin with Bathsheba; yet, David bore the consequences. We also learn an oft-mentioned principle in the Bible: what you sow, you shall reap. **“Do not be deceived: God cannot be mocked. A man reaps what he sows. The one who sows to please his sinful nature, from that nature will reap destruction; the one who sows to please the Spirit, from the Spirit will reap eternal life”** (Gal. 6:7,8). In this case, David, almost literally, reaped what he sowed: he lay with another man’s wife, so another man lay with his concubines.

God is a just God; yet, God is also a merciful God. Despite the afflictions and, yes, even punishment that we face, God is with us and He is in control of the situation. This is the theme of this Psalm. David confessed his sin to God and repented from his sin and, thus, David could look to

God as his Savior. As the Lord says: "Fear not, for I have redeemed you; I have summoned you by name; you are mine. When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and when you pass through the rivers, they will not sweep over you. When you walk through the fire, you will not be burned; the flames will not set you ablaze. For I am the LORD, your God, the Holy One of Israel, your Savior" (Isa. 43:1-3).

This Psalm can be divided into four parts: vv. 1-2 - David looks at the circumstances without considering God; vv. 3-4 - David considers God in the circumstances; vv. 5-6 - peace as a result of trusting in God; vv. 7-8 - confidence for David that God is in control.

David begins with the words "O LORD". Our advantage as children of God over our enemies in any situation is that we can turn to God for help. As Paul points out: "**If God is for us, who can be against us?**" (Rom. 8:31). And the Psalmist says: "**The LORD is with me; I will not be afraid. What can man do to me?**" (Ps. 118:6). I feel for those who do not turn to the Lord in their times of trouble. I have known the Lord most of my life and, so, I cannot imagine what it would be like to face affliction without His help. Turn to Him in your time of trouble!

When David says: "**How many are my foes! How many rise up against me!**" (vs. 1), he is not asking questions, but expressing exclamations of surprise. The Godly are often surprised when they face trials. They think that since they are God's children, they are exempt from trouble. However, God has made it very clear in His Word that we will undergo hardship and affliction. The trials that we face are different than the trials that those of the world face. Our trials are for our good. "**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). The Psalmist says: "**Before I was afflicted I went astray, but now I obey your word**" (Ps. 119:67). And Paul points out: "**For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all**" (II Cor 4:17). Thus, rather than bemoan our afflicted life, we can rejoice, for "**blessed is the man who perseveres under trial, because when he has stood the test, he will receive the crown of life that God has promised to those who love Him**" (James 1:12).

There were, in fact, "**many**" that rose up against David at this time. David's estimation of the situation agrees with the historical account: "**A messenger came and told David, 'The hearts of the men of Israel are with Absalom'**" (II Sam. 15:13). Therefore, from a worldly point of view, David had reason to view the situation as hopeless. It is natural for men to consider a situation hopeless when they see no worldly help. However, the child of God must consider his Heavenly Father's role in the situation. God is in control. He allows no affliction to strike us that He has not ordained for our good. God controls all the circumstances of our lives and, also, the length of our lives: "**Man's days are determined; you have**

decreed the number of his months and have set limits he cannot exceed" (Job 14:5).

The "many" that rose up against David are certainly the same "many" who lauded David earlier in his life. The women would come out and sing: **"Saul has slain his thousands, and David his tens of thousands"** (I Sam. 18:7). But people are fickle. The same who lauded David, rebel with Absalom; the same who lauded Christ as He entered Jerusalem, shouted "Crucify Him" just days later. Never set your hope on man or you will be disappointed. Put your trust in the Rock of Your salvation, Jesus Christ.

In David's situation, the crowds were saying: **"God will not deliver him."** Often people speak incorrectly for God. More often than not, the incorrect word attributed to God will result in discouragement for the hearer. The Spirit of God will strive to communicate the correct word of the Lord, which will conflict with the false prophecy. Thus, the hearer will be confused by conflicting "words from the Lord". The book of Job contains examples of this. Much of the book of Job consists of Job's friends incorrectly "speaking" for God, offering their own opinions about why Job is afflicted. Later, the Lord upbraids them directly when He speaks to one of Job's friends: **"I am angry with you and your two friends, because you have not spoken of me what is right, as my servant Job has"** (Job 42:7). Be careful that you do not incorrectly speak the words of God. False prophecy is a serious sin, demanding death as a punishment: **"But a prophet who presumes to speak in my name anything I have not commanded him to say, or a prophet who speaks in the name of other gods, must be put to death"** (Deut. 18:20). Instead of boldly stating, "Thus saith the Lord!", it is much safer to humbly say, "I believe the Lord may be saying such and such to you. Seek the Lord's guidance on this issue."

In David's situation, the people seemed to know that David was under the rod of correction from God, but they were incorrect in presuming that David was no longer under God's protection. They were misrepresenting God, not taking into account God's mercy on the repentant. **"God will not deliver him"** was the worst that they could say concerning David. There is no worse position than to be out of the mercy of God. To be forsaken of God is the worst of afflictions, thus, Christ's cry on the cross: **"My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"** (Ps. 22:1; Matt. 27:46).

This section of the Psalm ends with the musical term **"Selah"**. This term is thought to have signaled a pause in the music or possibly a musical interlude. Whatever the case may be, the positions of **"Selah"** in the Psalms represent appropriate places for the reader to meditate on what has been written.

In verse 3, with the word **"But"**, David turns from looking with worldly eyes at his situation, and turns his eyes upward to God. How dif-

ferent a situation looks when God is seen as a participant! True faith turns to God in all calamities. He's our shield from danger, the source of any glory we may have, the lifter of our heads in dejection. We not only can trust in God to execute His will in the situation, but we can also rejoice in the midst of trials, because of God's sovereignty in the situation.

In David's situation, he sees that the result of his afflictions will be "**glory**". David's chief "**glory**" is the fact that he was an ancestor and even a type of Christ. David as king suffered persecution from the rebellion of his subjects, just as Christ as King suffered persecution from the rebellion of His subjects. Thus, the result of David's affliction was that he was given the honor of being a type of Christ in the Bible. What greater glory could there be for a child of God!

Next, in verse 4, David cries to the Lord in his affliction and the Lord answers him. We, as God's children, can be certain our cries to the Lord are heard and answered with no exception. Often, when it seems like we do not receive an answer from God, it is because His answer does not conform to our expectation. We must be attuned to the Lord's answer, even if it is not what we expect. In David's case, the Lord did not deliver him from the trial; rather, the Lord gave David peace through the trial. This may not have been the answer that David wanted; nevertheless, David recognized it as the Lord's answer to his prayer.

The Lord's answer came from "**His holy hill**", Zion, in the city of the Lord, the future site of the temple and symbolically the dwelling place of the God Most High. Zion was viewed as the place where the people met God in prayer. Just as David looked to the holy hill, so we can look to Christ, who has superceded the temple. In the book of John, Jesus said to the Jews: "**Destroy this temple, and I will raise it again in three days**" (John 2:19). Then John explains: "**But the temple he had spoken of was his body**" (John 2:21). The temple is a type of Christ in at least three ways: 1. He is the center of our worship; 2. We meet with God through Him; 3. He is the location of the final and ultimate sacrifice and atonement for sins.

In verses 5 and 6, we see the evidence of God's answer to David's prayer. God answered David's prayer by giving David peace through the trial, as evidenced by the fact that David could "**lie down and sleep**". Those who see the Lord's hand in the situation can sleep in the storm, even as Jesus slept in the storm: "**Without warning, a furious storm came up on the lake, so that the waves swept over the boat. But Jesus was sleeping**" (Matt. 8:24). Jesus knew that His life was in the Father's hands because He gave Himself totally over to obeying the Father's will. So, in this situation, David entrusts himself to the Lord.

David says "**I wake again**", as if he didn't expect to. He resigned himself totally to the Lord's will, even if it meant death. David realized that his life was in the Lord's hands, for he says that he awoke "**because the LORD sustains**" him. The Lord kept the enemy away during David's

sleep. In the same way, the Lord sustains us in our sleep each night. Who but the Lord keeps us breathing, keeps our heart beating and keeps our life-blood flowing during the night as we sleep?

David goes on to say: **“I will not fear”**. In his time of danger, David not only finds solace (he sleeps), but also confidence (he does not fear). He receives not only peace of mind (evidenced by his sleep), but also peace in the situation (evidenced by his confidence). David’s confidence in the situation could only have come from the Lord. In the eyes of the world, it is a miraculous confidence that does not fear **“the tens of thousands drawn up”** on every side.

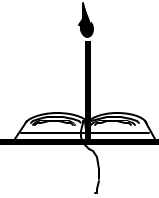
David’s confidence in the situation was not in himself, but the Lord, to deliver him. Because of this, he entered the battle with a prayer. We must remember to lean on the Lord for deliverance, even after He has given us confidence in our time of trouble. We have the tendency, after the Lord has given us peace of mind and confidence, to think that from then on we can make it alone. We must lean on the Lord in all phases of the battle. We must realize that “from the Lord”, and from the Lord alone “comes deliverance”.

Indeed, the passage of the Godly through trials is a testimony to those who do not know the Lord that “from the LORD comes deliverance”. David’s deliverance was a testimony to this; Job’s deliverance was a testimony to this; and indeed, Jesus’ deliverance from the grave by His resurrection from the dead was a testimony that “from the LORD comes deliverance”. Our deliverance is from the Lord, and from the Lord alone: it is not by our works or our abilities, but by His grace and mercy. “It does not, therefore, depend on man’s desire or effort, but on God’s mercy” (Rom. 9:16). Indeed, this is the main theme of the Bible and the message of the gospel: “From the LORD comes deliverance”.

David ends the Psalm with the prayer to the Lord: “May your blessing be on your people”. Though we pass through trials, God’s blessing is still on us. Moreover, it is stated in the Bible over and over that God’s people are blessed because of their trials. As cited above: “Blessed is the man who perseveres under trial, because when he has stood the test, he will receive the crown of life that God has promised to those who love him” (James 1:12). Also, “Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven” (Matt. 5:10) and “But even if you should suffer for what is right, you are blessed” (I Pet. 3:14).

From the world’s point of view, those who submitted to Absalom’s leadership considered themselves blessed. In reality though, Absalom’s leadership was destructive to his followers because he put them at enmity with God’s people and, ultimately, with God Himself.

For Reflection The Coming Day



The Coming Day

Beyond the war-clouds and the reddened ways,
I see the Promise of the Coming Days!
I see His Sun arise, new charged with grace
Earth's tears to dry and all her woes efface!
Christ lives! Christ loves! Christ rules!
No more shall Might,
Though leagued with all the Forces of the Night,
Ride over Right. No more shall Wrong
The world's gross agonies prolong.
Who waits His Time shall surely see
The triumph of His Constancy;—
When without let, or bar, or stay,
The coming of His Perfect Day
Shall sweep the Powers of Night away;—
And Faith, replumed for nobler flight,
And Hope, aglow with radiance bright,
And Love, in loveliness bedight,
Shall greet the morning light!

-- John Oxenham (1852- 1941)

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All Fit to Serve

"How marvelous is God's providence in the mental and social character naturally possessed by His people, so as to fit them to act their several parts in life. In illustration, look at the ministers of Christ. One is timid, and God makes him especially useful to the diffident in encouraging them, and to the self-confident in awakening salutary fears. Another is bold, and he alarms the guilty and encourages the wavering. One is full of love and so wins the coy and melts the hardened. Another is borne down by an awful sense of the danger of the wicked, and so he cries aloud and spares not. One is a son of thunder. Another is a son of consolation. One excels in logic, another in rhetoric. One is best at explaining the doctrines, another is excellent at exhortation. One does most good by his pen, another by private conversation, and another in the pulpit. Yet all these men are giving expression to their respective natural and social dispositions, now sanctified by divine grace, and turned to a holy work."

-- William Plumer (1802- 1880)

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