

Scripture Studies

VOL. X, No. 10

DECEMBER
2003

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

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Scripture Studies (ISSN: 1520-4308) is edited by Scott Sperling and published ten times a year by Scripture Studies, Inc., a non-profit organization. It is distributed all over the world by postal mail and via the internet free of charge. If you would like to financially support the publication and distribution of *Scripture Studies*, send contributions to:

**Scripture Studies Inc.
20 Pastora
Foothill Ranch, CA 92610
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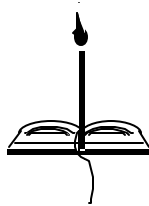
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May God bless you as you study His Word.



Old Testament Study: Genesis 3:1-7

The Temptation of Man

¹Now the serpent was more crafty than any of the wild animals the LORD God had made. He said to the woman, “Did God really say, ‘you must not eat from any tree in the garden?’”

²The woman said to the serpent, “We may eat fruit from the trees in the garden, ³but God did say, ‘You must not eat fruit from the tree that is in the middle of the garden, and you must not touch it, or you will die.’”

⁴“You will not surely die,” the serpent said to the woman.

⁵“For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.”

In this chapter, one could say, the main action of the plot of the Bible begins. However, the fall of man is more than just a plot element. It is the most significant event in the history of mankind: more significant than any war or victory; more significant than any scientific breakthrough or natural disaster; more significant even than the death and resurrection of Christ, for Christ’s advent would not have been necessary if man had never fallen.

Every aspect of our lives is affected by the fall and by the sin that the fall introduced to the world. In our careers, we toil under the curse of the fall. As a society, we live in strife. In our bodies, we suffer pain and sickness. Even our leisure-time activities are influenced by the fall: the arts are expressions of man’s anguish as a result of man’s fallen state; lyrics in music often reflect failed relationships, failed due to selfishness, pride, deceit, etc.; sports and competition are driven by man’s desire to exalt himself over others. The fall has seriously affected our ability to relate to one another and to live at peace with one another. Most importantly, the fall has seriously affected our ability to relate to God and to live at peace with Him. The main theme of the Bible concerns the restoration of our relationship to God and the redemption of man from his sinful state, climaxing at the cross of Christ, which made the way for us to return to God. Just as man chose to rebel against God in his sin, so man can also choose to return to God by accepting the sacrifice of Christ to pay the price for his sin. Thus, Christ’s sacrifice, in a sense, undoes the event of the fall and brings man back to God. This is what the story of the Bible and, indeed, this is what the history of mankind is all about.

Moses, the author of Genesis, here introduces us to the serpent, the

instrument that Satan used to deceive Eve and bring about the fall of man. That it is Satan that indwells the serpent is confirmed by other Scriptures. The Lord relates through Ezekial that Satan was in the Garden of Eden: **“You were in Eden, the garden of God”** (Ezek. 28:13). Christ alludes to Satan’s deception of Eve as murder, as He spoke to the Pharisees: **“You belong to your father, the devil, and you want to carry out your father’s desire. He was a murderer from the beginning, not holding to the truth, for there is no truth in him”** (John 8:44). John, in the book of Revelation, specifically identifies the serpent when he describes a future incarnation of Satan as “the great dragon”: **“The great dragon was hurled down—that ancient serpent called the devil, or Satan, who leads the whole world astray”** (Rev. 12:9). So, there is no doubt that it was Satan who used the serpent to deceive Eve.

Moses chooses to relate the episode of the fall from the point of view of Adam and Eve. There is no indication that Adam and Eve realized that a spiritual being, Satan, was inhabiting the serpent. I believe that God did not allow Satan to appear to Eve in his own form, because it probably would have awed Eve. God allowed Eve to be tempted by Satan in the form of an animal so that she would not think that the tempter was a superior being to her. Man was specifically tasked to rule over the animals (cf. Gen. 1:26,28). As a ruler, rather than listen to the serpent, Eve should have punished the serpent for being in open rebellion against the Lord. Thus, one reason for the fall is that man failed to carry out properly the service that God assigned to him.

Moses informs us that **“the serpent was more crafty than any of the wild animals the LORD God had made” (vs. 1)**. Satan presumably chose the serpent because of this trait. Satan took advantage of the craftiness of the serpent to use the serpent to deceive Eve. In the same way, Satan looks for character traits in us that he can use for his advantage. Be careful of the enemy using your weaknesses for his work. If you are prone to anger, lust, pride, abuse of power, be careful lest the enemy use you.

Having studied the animals while he was naming them, Adam was most certainly aware of the serpent’s craftiness. Satan, therefore, approaches Eve, who apparently did not have as much knowledge concerning the animals as Adam did, since she did not exist when the animals were named. So, we see that Satan shrewdly chose to focus his attack on Eve because she was less prepared to counteract the temptation. The tempter is shrewd. We must be on guard and be aware of his devices. The Bible is full of examples of Satan’s work. We should study the Word of God with this in mind in order to learn from these examples, so that we will not fall into the same traps.

Satan begins by asking, **“Did God really say...?”**. True to Satan’s nature, this question is replete with deception. First, Satan depersonalizes the Lord by calling Him **“God”**. Throughout the second chapter of Genesis, which describes the foundation of God’s relationship with Adam

and Eve, God is referred to as **“the LORD God”**. As explained in the last issue of *Scripture Studies*, the designation **“LORD”** (“YHWH” in Hebrew) is the personal name of God. Since this designation is used in chapter two and also later in chapter three, we must assume that Adam and Eve normally addressed God using His personal name **“LORD”**. Satan, however, refers to the Lord as **“God”**, presumably with the motive of depersonalizing Him. In doing so, Satan turns his conversation with Eve into a theoretical discussion about some abstract entity (**“God”**), instead of about a personal friend of hers, the LORD. Many do this today. They treat God as some abstract being rather than the personal God that He is. Those of the world must be made aware that God is intimately concerned with and involved in the affairs of His creation, and not an unfeeling, impersonal essence.

The question **“Did God really say...?”** can be interpreted two ways:

1. Casting doubt on what God said. In other words, the question could be interpreted as saying: “Are you sure that you heard right? Did God really say that?” So today, many will ignore the command of God because Satan sows the seed of doubt as to whether God really did make such a command.

2. Questioning the motive of God’s saying it. In other words, the question could be interpreted as saying: “Are you kidding? That’s pretty unreasonable. Did God really say that?” And again today, many will ignore the command of God because they perceive that the command is unreasonable. Those who do this are putting themselves above God: They do not understand the motive for the command, so the command must be unreasonable. Instead, they should realize that God is wiser than they are. True obedience to God is to be satisfied and content with the command of God, even not knowing the reason behind it, trusting in the fact that God is righteous, holy and good.

So, Satan’s first tactics during his conversation with Eve is both to cast doubt upon and to question the command of God.

Moses goes on to relate what **“the woman said to the serpent”**. Eve’s first mistake was to listen to Satan. She should have said, as Christ did, **“Get behind me, Satan”** (Matt. 16:23). Eve’s second mistake was to listen to Satan with interest. We should never try to dwell on the words and ideas of Satan. He is shrewder than we are, easily able to deceive us. Eve’s third mistake was to respond to Satan. Seeing Eve’s openness and eagerness to carry on the conversation, Satan jumped right in and continued with his deception. We must learn from this episode: do not respond to Satan, do not be interested in Satan and his evil, do not even listen to him. Satan is powerless in temptation if we do not entertain his advances. As James exhorts: **“Resist the devil, and he will flee from you”** (James 4:7).

The root of Eve's being deceived was in her incorrect handling of God's Word. In her answer to the serpent, Eve corrupted the Word of God in three ways:

1. She took away from God's Word. In Gen. 2:16, God said that they were "**free to eat**" or, more accurately, they may "**freely eat**" (see NAS, RSV, KJV, et. al.) from all of the other trees in the garden. Eve merely said that they "**may eat**". This omission may seem trivial, but it is significant in that it causes emphasis to be placed upon the prohibition from eating from the one tree, rather than the allowance to eat from all of the other trees.

2. She added to God's Word. Eve related to the serpent that God said "**you must not touch**" the tree. There is no record of God making that prohibition. This addition to God's Word is significant in that it pictures God as making unreasonable prohibitions. We must be careful that we do not add to God's Word and, thus, misrepresent the character of God. The area in which I have most seen people add to God's Word concerns the observance of the Sabbath. I have heard of well-meaning Christians prohibit skiing, golfing, sewing, going to Disneyland, etc. on Sundays. In doing so, they portray God as One who does not want His children to have any fun! They also deny the fulfillment of the Sabbath law by the rest we find in Christ (cf. Heb. 4:9,10; Col. 2:16-17).

3. She modified God's Word. In Genesis 2:17, God said that when they eat of the forbidden fruit that they "**will surely die**", stating in no uncertain terms that they will die. In Gen. 3:3, Eve related that God told them not to eat of the forbidden fruit "**lest you die**" (see NAS, RSV, KJV, et. al.), as if to say maybe they will die and maybe they won't. Thus, she weakened the certainty of the punishment of disobeying God.

So, we see that Eve, when dealing with the temptations of Satan, misused the Word of God. This is contrasted to Christ's resistance of temptation by accurately citing Word of God in Matt. 3. Knowing the Bible accurately is a powerful weapon in the resistance of temptation. Be prepared! Study and know the Word of God accurately, so that you may resist in the time of temptation.

Satan took advantage of Eve's misuse of God's Word. He quickly chimed in "**You will not surely die**", which was a direct contradiction to the words of God in Gen. 2:17. Satan was capitalizing on Eve's implied doubt as to whether they will really die for eating the forbidden fruit.

Satan says the same thing today. He says to many, "**you will not surely die**". The belief that God will not really punish sinners is prevalent. Many, even some in the pulpit, deny the existence of hell and eternal punishment. . To deny the existence of hell is to contradict the Word of God (for the Bible clearly affirms its existence, see Isa. 66:24; Matt. 3:12; Matt. 13:42; Matt. 18:8; Matt. 25:41; Rev. 20:15; Rev. 21:8), is to water

down the holiness of God (by implying that those who have not been cleansed from sin can enter His presence) and is to deny the righteousness of God (by implying that God will allow sin to go unpunished). More significantly, to deny the existence of hell is to claim that Christ's sacrifice for us was futile. Why would we need a Savior if there is nothing to be saved from?

Again, even today, Satan says to many: **"You will not surely die"**, and he makes the statement with emphases in different places. Sometimes he says, **"You will not surely die"**, as if to say, "You are a 'good' person. Why would God punish you?" Sometimes he says, **"You will not surely die"**, as if to say, "It is by no means certain that you will die. There must be another way out." Sometimes he says, **"You will not surely die"**, as if to say, "The punishment for sin could not possibly be *death*, but surely something weaker." Whatever the emphasis, this statement is dangerous. There is only one way to escape the punishment of death for sin, and that is by acceptance of the atoning sacrifice for sin of Christ on the cross.

Satan goes on to say to Eve that she will not die **"for God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God"** (vs. 5). Here, Satan not only casts doubt on the truth of the punishment, but also casts aspersions on the motive of God for making the command. Satan is, in effect, saying, "You will not surely die. God only said that because He does not want you to become like Him." Satan here is denying that God loves us unselfishly; Satan is denying that God desires only the best for us. And as it was in the beginning, so it is now. Satan claims that the command of God is to keep us from enjoying life. However, the more that you study and obey the law of God, the more that you realize that the law is for our good. Why are we so apt to believe Satan, yet disbelieve God? Satan says that God does not love us, but there is an extremely powerful argument that supports the fact that God indeed does love us: **"But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us"** (Rom. 5:8). Satan may say that God does not love us, but God *demonstrated* His love for us.

Satan told Eve that if she ate of the forbidden fruit, she would **"be like God, knowing good and evil"**. This was a true but misleading statement from the father of lies. Yes, she would be like God in that she would have the knowledge of good and evil; but, in dying spiritually, she was to lose her holiness, thus becoming less like God in that respect. Her exaltation from the knowledge of good and evil was to be miniscule as compared to the fall that resulted from her sin.

The desire to **"be like God"** tempts many. Some false religions appeal to people because they promise that one can **"be like God"**. The desire for knowledge also tempts many. We have the mistaken belief that more knowledge is good and invariably brings happiness. This is not so. On the contrary, the knowledge of good and evil brought death to the first man and woman, just as it brings death today.

The Sin of Man

⁶When the woman saw that the fruit of the tree was good for food and pleasing to the eye, and also desirable for gaining wisdom, she took some and ate it. She also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate it. ⁷Then the eyes of both of them were opened, and they realized they were naked; so they sewed fig leaves together and made coverings for themselves.

After her encounter with Satan, Eve viewed the tree as she never had before. She **“saw that the fruit of the tree was good for food and pleasing to the eye, and also desirable for gaining wisdom”**. Often, through the influence of Satan, we view the forbidden things with pleasure, the perverted things with passion, the shameful things with pride. The glass he holds in front of our eyes colors to make sin enticing, desirable, even permissible; yet, that same glass blinds us to the destruction of sin. Eve no longer viewed the fruit as the bringer of death, but as the giver of pleasure.

The three elements of temptation that confronted Eve when she then looked at the fruit are elements found, either singly or collectively, in all temptation, even in the present day (cf. I John 2:16, KJV):

1. Lust of the flesh: she saw that the fruit was **“good for food”**. Bodily desires, when improperly channeled, are the source of many temptations.

2. Lust of the eyes: the fruit was also **“pleasing to the eye”**. Jesus summed up the danger of allowing our eyes to dwell on things that we should not: **“The eye is the lamp of the body. If your eyes are good, your whole body will be full of light. But if your eyes are bad, your whole body will be full of darkness”** (Matt. 6:22-23).

3. The pride of life: she saw the fruit as **“desirable for gaining wisdom”**. All men, from the youngest age, have a desire to be the best, to exalt themselves over others. This attitude is contrary to the teachings of Christ. When the disciples were arguing about which of them would be considered the greatest, Jesus said to them: **“The kings of the Gentiles lord it over them; and those who exercise authority over them call themselves Benefactors. But you are not to be like that. Instead, the greatest among you should be like the youngest, and the one who rules like the one who serves”** (Luke 22:25,26). Christ Himself is our example in this, for He, **“being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant”** (Phil. 2:6,7).

Interestingly, these three elements were also used by Satan to tempt

Christ in Luke 4. Christ was told by Satan to break His fast by turning the stones into bread, trying to appeal to the fleshly desires. Christ was shown by Satan all the kingdoms of the world over which He could reign, trying to appeal to the lust of the eyes. Christ was told to jump off the pinnacle of the temple and cause the angels to come to His rescue, trying to appeal to the pride of life. Note also the order of the three elements of temptation in the narrative: first, “**good for food**” then “**pleasing to the eye**” then “**desirable for gaining wisdom**”. Satan works from the outside to the inside, appealing to the physical desires with the goal of winning over the heart. This is the opposite of how God works. God works from the inside to the outside. He desires first a repentant heart, then He works to change the external behavior. Many hesitate to turn to God, saying, “My life is a mess.” We must realize that God does not expect us to come to Him in a perfect state. God sent His Son so that we would not have to be holy to come to Him. Come to Him first, as you are, then He will transform you.

Moses then relates that “**she took some and ate it**”. In addition, “**she also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate it**”. And so, death entered the world. Paul states that “**sin entered the world through one man, and death through sin**” (Rom. 5:12).

Eve was not content just to eat the forbidden fruit herself, but “**she also gave some to her husband**”. Note the progression of her sin: first she looked upon the forbidden fruit, then desired it, then took it, then ate it and finally gave it to her husband. We are not content just to sin ourselves; unfortunately, we must corrupt others too. Sin loves company. We feel comforted when we hear that others sin in the ways that we sin. This is wrong. We must detest sin, in ourselves and in others.

Interestingly, throughout the Bible, Adam, not Eve, gets the blame for the fall of mankind. The Lord, speaking to Israel through Isaiah, reminds us: “**Your first father sinned**” (Isa. 43:27). Paul relates that “**sin entered the world through one man**” (Rom. 5:12). He goes on to say that “**death reigned from the time of Adam**” (Rom. 5:13). Elsewhere, Paul teaches that “**as in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive**” (I Cor. 15:22). Why does Adam get the blame? Two possible reasons:

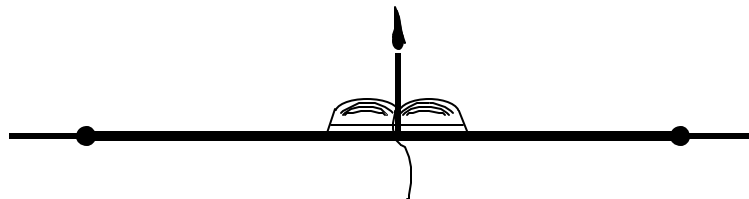
1. It was Adam’s sin, not Eve’s, that brought the fall of mankind *in toto*. If Eve had sinned but Adam did not, mankind would not have fallen. Eve would have eventually died, but Adam would have continued to live. Though, to carry on the human race, Adam, quite possibly, would have lost another rib!

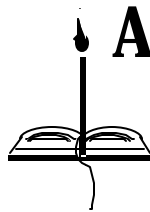
2. Eve was deceived. All mention of Eve in the Bible outside of the book of Genesis speaks of her as being deceived. “**But I am afraid that just as Eve was deceived by the serpent’s cunning, your minds may**

somehow be led astray from your sincere and pure devotion to Christ" (II Cor. 11:3). **"And Adam was not the one deceived; it was the woman who was deceived and became a sinner"** (I Tim. 2:14). The fact that she was deceived does not lessen her responsibility for the sin, but it does point out a striking contrast between her sin and Adam's. Eve was deceived; but Adam knew full well what he was doing. Adam knowingly chose to obey Eve and die, rather than to obey God and live. Adam loved the creature more than the Creator. This set up Adam as a **"pattern"** (as Paul says in Rom. 5:14) of Christ. Just as Christ chose to die to be with His bride (the church), so Adam chose to die to be with His bride (Eve). However, as Paul argues in Rom. 5:15-21, **"the gift is not like the trespass"** (Rom. 5:15). Adam's death was a consequence of disobedience to God and resulted in death for all mankind, but Christ's death was in obedience to God and resulted in life for mankind.

In any case, both Adam's and Eve's sins resulted in death. They both took of the forbidden fruit and ate it. Whether deceived or not, it was their choice to disobey the direct command of God.

The immediate result of their sin and the obtaining of the knowledge of good and evil was guilt and shame: **"Then the eyes of both of them were opened, and they realized they were naked"** (vs. 7). The first sin brought into action the first evidence of a conscience. Their desire was to immediately cover their sin. However, even though their sin was against God, instead of going to Him to seek atonement, they try by their own means to cover their sin and to appease their guilt. By sewing **"fig leaves"** together, they try to cover their sin. This same means is used today. Many think that by their own works that they can balance out the consequences of their sin. We see many **"fig leaves"** today: feeding the poor, giving money for the work of God, religious rituals, church-going, etc. These are noble works but they do not cover one's sin in the sight of God or save one from the death that results from sin. **"For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast"** (Eph. 2:8-9). It is only through faith in the finished work of Christ on the cross that we can atone for our sins.





A Study of Exhortation

Romans 12:6-8

The Gifts of the Spirit

⁶We have different gifts, according to the grace given us. If a man's gift is prophesying, let him use it in proportion to his faith. ⁷If it is serving, let him serve; if it is teaching, let him teach; ⁸if it is encouraging, let him encourage; if it is contributing to the needs of others, let him give generously; if it is leadership, let him govern diligently; if it is showing mercy, let him do it cheerfully. (Rom. 12:6-8).

In these verses, Paul continues his series of exhortations that deal with a Christian's relationship to other Christians. This section carries on the thought began in verses 4 and 5. There, he gave the analogy that the fellowship of Christians form one body in Christ, each member with its proper function. Here, he defines the functions as the spiritual gifts God has given us and enumerates some of these gifts, also expressing the attitude one should have in using them.

Paul begins by saying: **"We have different gifts"**. Note first that **"we"**, all of us, have gifts to use in the service of God. This exhortation is addressed to all of us, not just to pastors, missionaries, elders, deacons, etc. Therefore, each of us must determine what our gift is and how God would have us use it. Are you having trouble discerning what your gifts are? Your natural talents, abilities, even your character traits, are clues as to how God would have you serve Him. We must not forget that our talents and abilities are gifts given by God for His service, not solely for our own benefit. It is foolish to use your abilities merely for your own benefit. How will you feel meeting the Lord, never having used the gifts He has given you to serve Him?

Carrying on from his analogy in verses 4 and 5, Paul emphasizes that we all have **"different"** gifts. Christians are not uniform clones. God has blessed us all with **"different"** natural talents and strengths, as well as **"different"** gifts of the Holy Spirit. Having **"different"** gifts implies a division and distribution of labor, a division and distribution established by the Lord. Never feel like you must fit into someone else's mold, serving the Lord in the same way that they are. God has not made us all to be

pastors, missionaries, street evangelists, etc. We have not all been given the character traits to do these things. Find the methods of service God has prepared for you specifically, and then rest in them.

The gifts are “**according to the grace given us**”, not according to our own ambition or effort, not by our desire to do a great work for God, but by God’s grace and His desire to achieve His purpose in our lives for His kingdom. This is why it is essential that we seek the guidance of the Holy Spirit when we serve Him. Often, the ways that He would have us serve Him are very different than the ways we would initially choose to serve Him.

Paul goes on to enumerate some of the “**different gifts**” of the Holy Spirit and to describe how the gifts should be practiced:

1. **Prophecy** - A “prophet”, in the Bible, is anyone speaking with Divine authority and under the direct influence of the Holy Spirit, whether they are speaking concerning the past, present or future (“prophets” do not necessarily predict the future). The gift of prophecy is important. Paul, when enumerating spiritual gifts in another place, ranks the office of prophet second only to apostle: “**And in the church God has appointed first of all apostles, second prophets, third teachers**” (I Cor. 12:28). Here, Paul says that a prophet should use his gift “**in proportion to his faith**”. A prophet should not prophesy anything that is not according to his faith. He should not speak as a prophet without being certain he is speaking the words of God. He should not get carried away with enthusiasm and begin to speak his own words while prophesying. Never feel that you are obliged to prophesy because everybody else is doing it. The punishment for false prophecy in the Old Testament was death: “**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). So, be careful when using the words “Thus saith the Lord”. Note also, that prophecy must also be *in accord* with our faith. It should not contradict the doctrines and principles of the Word of God. Anyone prophesying something contrary to the Word of God is a false prophet.

2. **Serving** - Doing God’s work by humbly serving His people is an important gift. Personally serving others has a great positive impact on the world’s view of Christians and Christianity. It has much more impact than the work of great speakers or expositors. Those who serve by doing menial, low-profile work should not feel that they are less valuable to God. God honors those who responsibly and diligently carry out what He has called them to do, whether it be pastoring a church or waxing its floors.

3. **Teaching** - Teaching is different than prophecy. Teaching mainly entails the interpretation, exposition and explanation of the Bible. Teachers should not feel that they must be speaking words directly from God (as

do prophets); however, teachers should seek the guidance and instruction of the Holy Spirit as they prepare to teach.

4. **Encouraging** - We all appreciate a word of encouragement. Encouragement is a valuable gift that can be given to all: for the Christian in his service of God; for the downtrodden and persecuted to trust and depend on the Lord; for the sinner to repent and turn to Jesus. I dare say that we can all serve the Lord at one time or another using the gift of encouragement.

5. **Giving** - Some are endowed by God the talent and ability to make money in this world. These are the ones who are prime candidates to cultivate the gift of giving! However, the gift of giving is not limited to financial giving. As Peter, you can say, "**Silver or gold I do not have, but what I have I give you**" (Acts 3:6). You can give services, talents, time, etc. And when you give, do it as Jesus commanded: "**Freely you have received, freely give**" (Matt. 10:8). Also, Paul in these verses encourages the giver to "**give generously**". Giving should not be limited to the "duty" of tithing.

6. **Leadership** - The gift of leadership is, indeed, a gift from God. Very few are given the ability to be good leaders. Leadership is an important gift specifically in the organization of a church and its ministries. Every activity and service of a church needs a leader. Leaders should not take their role lightly, but, as Paul says, they should "**govern diligently**".

7. **Mercy** - Mercy is a Godly trait. Our God is characterized by His mercy. When one truly shows mercy, he is being a true representative of God. However, as Paul says, when you show mercy, do it "**cheerfully**", not grudgingly, not because you "have to", but sincerely and from the heart.

So, seek the gift that God would specifically have you use to serve Him. Do not try to copy the gifts of others, but cultivate and practice your specific gifts. Just think how productive and influential the church could be if all used their specific, God-ordained gifts in His service.

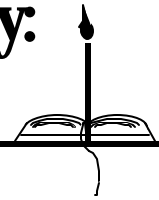
As you use your gifts, recognize that you are doing the work of God. Do not take your service lightly, but seriously; practice it diligently and responsibly, for the boss is always watching!

Now Father, we thank You that we can be of service to You. Guide us in our service, leading us to the methods of service that You have prepared for us. Give us a heart for service so that we may represent You faithfully as we serve. Let our service be a reflection of Your love to those around us. We ask these things Jesus' name. Amen.



New Testament Study:

James 2:1-4



The Sin of Favoritism

¹My brothers, as believers in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ, don't show favoritism. ²Suppose a man comes into your meeting wearing a gold ring and fine clothes, and a poor man in shabby clothes also comes in. ³If you show special attention to the man wearing fine clothes and say, "Here's a good seat for you," but say to the poor man, "You stand there" or "Sit on the floor by my feet," ⁴have you not discriminated among yourselves and become judges with evil thoughts?

Here, James begins a section where he speaks against the sin of favoritism. It is wrong to show favoritism based on external circumstances, whether it is favoritism to the rich or to the poor: **"Do not pervert justice; do not show partiality to the poor or favoritism to the great, but judge your neighbor fairly"** (Lev. 19:15). James here focusses on the more prevalent case: showing favoritism to someone because of their riches. It is natural for the world to honor the rich and famous, because riches and fame are things for which those of the world strive. As Christians, we should have different values. Therefore, we should esteem individuals for different reasons than the world does. As Paul says, **"So from now on we regard no one from a worldly point of view"** (II Cor. 5:16).

We should examine ourselves concerning favoritism. Do we favor the worldly wealthy? Are our heroes the great athletes, the rich entrepreneurs, the glamorous actors? Are we not surely guilty of showing favoritism to the worldly wealthy, even at church? Unfortunately, upon examination, I think that most of will indeed find ourselves guilty in this regard. We greet the rich and upstanding, while ignoring the lowly and humble. We admire worldly wealth on the outside, ignoring the presence of God on the inside. We often allow fame to excuse immorality, being more tolerant of the actions of the rich. The excellent of the world should not gain our respect and honor, but the excellent in Christ. Our only consideration of outward adornment should be based on if one is clothed with the righteousness of Christ.

Indeed, Christ Himself is our example in this. He never showed special treatment based on external circumstances, but rather dealt with people based on the condition of their hearts. Even the Pharisees recognized this. At one point, they said to Him: **“We know you are a man of integrity and that you teach the way of God in accordance with the truth. You aren’t swayed by men, because you pay no attention to who they are”** (Matt. 22:16).

In the passage we are studying, James begins by addressing his readers as **“My brothers”**, in order to underscore his point: All believers, whether rich or poor, are our brothers. James goes on to categorize those to whom his exhortation is directed as **“believers in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ”** (vs. 1). Love toward all, without favoritism, is an evidence and a fruit of true faith in Jesus Christ. Throughout this epistle, James “grounds Christian practice on Christian faith” [JFB]. Indeed, the main theme of this epistle is that true faith will result in behavior that reflects that faith. So here, James relates that favoritism is not consistent with being a **“believer”**.

Moreover, by telling **“believers”** not to show favoritism, he is reminding us that our standing in relation to God is derived from our faith, not our external circumstances. In the things of God, all have an equal advantage. Therefore, just as God does not show favoritism, but allows any and all to come to Him, we are not to show favoritism.

To explain what he means by favoritism, James describes a hypothetical situation, where a rich man and a poor man come into a church meeting. The rich man is **“wearing a gold ring and fine clothes”** (vs. 2). Many people don their jewelry and fine clothes at church, almost to invite special attention. There is a defect with churches that have “dress codes” (even though unwritten), in that those with humble means may feel intimidated to attend amongst the finery. A church should have an atmosphere such that all feel welcome, even the poorest, most wretched sinner.

The rich man is told, **“Here’s a good seat for you”** (vs. 3). This was a common practice in the synagogue, to reserve the best seats for the most wealthy. Nowadays, seats in the churches are normally not reserved in such a way; however, are not the elders and deacons of many churches chosen among the parishioners who are the most well-off? Do not the more wealthy receive more dinner invitations from fellow believers? Is not the better dressed newcomer given the better welcome at the church door? Unfortunately, favoritism is alive and well in the modern church.

In James’s hypothetical, the poor man was told **“You stand there”** (so as to be ready to serve) or to **“Sit on the floor by my feet”** (so as to be at a lowly position). In both cases, the result is to exalt the hypothetical speaker above the poor man. Thus, James asks rhetorically: **“Have**

you not discriminated among yourselves?”. Discrimination is a damaging sin to the cause of Christendom because of its poor testimony to the world.

Those who show favoritism have **“become judges with evil thoughts”**. In this, they doubly err: They not only are serving in a role to which they were not called (by being a judge), but they also are carrying out that role poorly (by showing partiality). To show favoritism is a sin, as cited above: **“Do not pervert justice; do not show partiality to the poor or favoritism to the great, but judge your neighbor fairly”** (Lev. 19:15). Thus, it is an **“evil thought”** that shows respect based on worldly riches.

Christmas Prayer

Let not our hearts be busy inns,
That have no room for Thee,
But cradles for the living Christ
And His nativity.

Still driven by a thousand cares
The pilgrims come and go;
The hurried caravans press on;
The inns are crowded so!

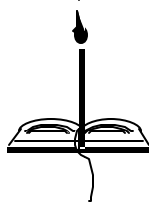
Here are the rich and busy ones,
With things that must be sold,
No room for simple things within
This hostelry of gold.

Yet hunger dwells within these walls,
These shining walls and bright,
And blindness groping here and there
Without a ray of light.

Oh, lest we starve, and lest we die,
In our stupidity,
Come, Holy Christ, within and share
Our hospitality.

Let not our hearts be busy inns,
That have no room for Thee,
But cradles for the living Christ,
And His nativity.

- - Ralph Spaulding Cushman (b. 1879)



A Study in Psalms: Psalm 5

Psalm 5 – David’s Prayer

For the director of music. For flutes.

A psalm of David.

- ¹Give ear to my words, O LORD,
consider my sighing.
- ²Listen to my cry for help, my King and my God,
for to You I pray.
- ³Morning by morning, O LORD, You hear my voice;
morning by morning I lay my requests
before You and wait in expectation.
- ⁴You are not a God who takes pleasure in evil;
with You the wicked cannot dwell.
- ⁵The arrogant cannot stand in Your presence;
You hate all who do wrong.
- ⁶You destroy those who tell lies;
bloodthirsty and deceitful men
the LORD abhors.
- ⁷But I, by Your great mercy,
will come into Your house;
In reverence will I bow down
toward Your holy temple.
- ⁸Lead me, O LORD, in Your righteousness
because of my enemies--
Make straight Your way before me.
- ⁹Not a word from their mouth can be trusted;
their heart is filled with destruction.
Their throat is an open grave;
with their tongue they speak deceit.
- ¹⁰Declare them guilty, O God!
Let their intrigues be their downfall.
Banish them for their many sins,
for they have rebelled against You.
- ¹¹But let all who take refuge in You be glad;
let them ever sing for joy.
Spread Your protection over them,
that those who love Your name
may rejoice in You.

¹²For surely, O LORD, You bless the righteous;
You surround them with Your favor
as with a shield.

Psalm 5, like the previous psalm, concerns prayer. In the first three verses, David prays to the Lord for help, and then **“waits in expectation”**. The rest of the psalm deals with the reasons that David’s prayer will be heard and answered: God’s hatred of evil (v. 4-6); the grace and guidance of God for His own people (v. 7-8); the utter depravity of David’s adversaries (v. 9-10); the blessings and protection that God bestows upon His people (v. 11-12).

David begins this psalm with a prayer. The specifics of his prayer are not stated, implying that the principles in this psalm can be applied to all prayers. We know only that David is crying **“for help”**, through numerous **“requests”**, and his problem is on-going, for he offers his prayer **“morning by morning”**.

His prayer consists of three requests: **“Give ear to my words”**, **“consider my sighing”**, and **“listen to my cry”**. In these three requests, David uses three styles of communication: his **“words”**, his **“sighing”**, and his **“cry”**.

First, David prays with his **“words”**: the reasoned, well thought-out expression of his petition to God. It is good to communicate to God requests that are well reasoned. Through the process of reasoning, God can lead us to a proper perspective of the situation, and even to an answer to the prayer.

Second, David prays with his **“sighing”**. There are times, especially in times of trouble, when we are at a loss of words, we cannot even express our prayers. We have reasoned through our petitions, we have stated with words the result of our reasoning, then we run out of words. In these times, we can depend on the Holy Spirit to express our prayer through our **“sighing”**, through our groanings, and, at times, through the gift of tongues. As Paul teaches: **“The Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groans that words cannot express”** (Rom. 8:26). David asks for the Lord to not only hear his words, but also his unuttered desires. “Words are not the essence but the garments of prayer” [Spurgeon]. Of course, **“your Father knows what you need before you ask Him”** (Matt. 6:8); so, the lack of words should not prevent you from praying! The spirit of prayer is much more important than the words that are spoken. A spirit without words is heard, but words without a spirit will never be.

Third, David prays with a **“cry”**. David not only prayed through reasoned requests, and spiritual sighings, but also with emotive cries. Your emotions are an expression of your desire; they communicate the seriousness of your request. James says: **“The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much”** (James 5:16, KJV). Christ is our example

in this: **“During the days of Jesus’ life on earth, He offered up prayers and petitions with loud cries and tears to the one who could save Him from death, and He was heard because of His reverent submission”** (Heb. 5:7). Can a loving Father resist the cries of His children?

David addresses his prayer in verse 1 directly to the **“LORD”**. It is our great privilege to be able to present our requests directly to the Creator of the Universe. Never undervalue this privilege! Also, in verse 2, David addresses his prayer to **“my King and my God”**. He prays to God not only as Creator, but as the King of the people of Israel, the God of the covenant, and also his personal God (as denoted by the **“my”**). David, though King of Israel, realizes that he is not the preeminent king, but that God is.

David presents his requests **“morning by morning”**. In Psalm 4, the evening was depicted as a good time for reflection. Here, the morning is shown as a good time for prayer. Indeed, it is good to seek the Lord early. To do so sets the mood for the day; it establishes who is sovereign over the day. Our thoughts should naturally turn to our Lord first thing in the morning. Note also that David does not just say “in the morning”, but **“morning by morning You hear my voice”**. David was consistent in prayer, not missing a morning. He could confidently say that the Lord would hear his voice each morning.

David prays in the morning by **“laying his requests”** before God. The words that he uses for presenting his requests are the same ones that are used for carefully arranging wood on an altar (as in Gen. 22:9; Lev.1:7; and I Kings 18:33) or for arranging the showbread on the table in the tabernacle (as in Ex. 40:23 and Lev. 24:6,8). This likens prayer to the most sacred of covenant rituals.

Finally, after presenting his requests before God, David in faith **“waits in expectation”**. Faith not only asks in prayer, but expects an answer. We should trust in God for an answer to our prayers. “Man fell from God by distrust, by having God in suspicion; God will bring him back by trust” [Swinnock, cited in Spurgeon].

David teaches us much about prayer in these verses. Our prayers should have purpose; our words are secondary to the spirit of prayer; our prayers should be heartfelt, with emotion; they are directed to a personal God; we should pray morning by morning; we should wait expectantly for an answer.

Having presented his prayer, David goes on to state four reasons why his prayer will be heard. In verses 4 through 6, he cites as a reason God’s hatred of evil. This, of course, implies that David’s prayer was a righteous prayer. It would be an insult to God’s holiness to pray for anything unrighteous. So, David is appealing to God on the basis of His righteousness. For a prayer to be answered by God, it must necessarily be consistent with His nature.

David first states that God is **“not a God who takes pleasure in evil”**. God hates sin. We must realize this. We tend to gloss over sin,

make light of sin, even at times take pride in sin, but, in no uncertain terms, God hates sin. Some mistake God's mercy for tolerance of sin.

David goes on to point out that, with God, **"the wicked cannot dwell"** (vs. 4). Only the holy can dwell with God. For God to tolerate the presence of the unrighteous would decrease His holiness. So, how is it that we Christians expect to dwell with God in heaven for eternity? Are we holy? Not in ourselves. But through our belief in Christ, we are imputed with righteousness. **"Through him everyone who believes is justified from everything you could not be justified from by the law of Moses"** (Acts 13:39) and **"Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ"** (Rom. 5:1).

In verses 7 and 8, David cites, as the second reason his prayer will be heard, God's grace and guidance for His people. He begins by saying: **"But I, by Your great mercy, will come into Your house"** (vs. 7). It is not because we are any better than the enemies of God that we are able to come to Him, but strictly by His **"great mercy"**.

Now, God's mercy is available to all, even David's enemies. David was set apart from his enemies and able to receive God's mercy for three reasons. First, David desired to receive God's mercy and, thus, was resolved to enter God's house, so he says assuredly **"I will"**. Second, David bowed down **"in reverence"** to God; he had a healthy respect and fear of God. Third, David desired to be led by the Lord and to live a holy life, so he says: **"Lead me, O LORD, in Your righteousness"** (vs. 8).

Note that it is the Lord's **"righteousness"**, not David's own, in which David desires to be led. Those who fear the Lord know that they need Him to help them walk in His ways. Those who have no reverence for the Lord think they are good enough on their own. In the book of Psalms, this is what distinguishes the righteous from the wicked. Again, it is not that the "righteous" are any better in themselves than the "wicked", or that the "righteous" have easier access to God's grace and guidance than the "wicked", it is that the "righteous" have chosen to fear the Lord and seek His righteousness. As "Wisdom" says in the book of Proverbs: **"Since they hated knowledge and did not choose to fear the LORD, since they would not accept my advice and spurned my rebuke, they will eat the fruit of their ways and be filled with the fruit of their schemes"** (Prov. 1:29-31).

David states that he needed to be led in the Lord's righteousness **"because of my enemies"** (vs. 8). Sin begets sin. Just being in the presence of the wicked will increase one's own chances of falling into sin, even if the wicked are one's adversaries. The wickedness of our enemies may cause us to rationalize our own sin, especially if they are gaining the victory. After all, we might say, "They're doing it. Why shouldn't I?" We must resist sin, especially in our conflicts with the wicked. Like David, despite the actions of our enemies, we should seek to be led in the right-

eousness of the Lord.

Also, we need God to light the path before us, to clear the obstacles from our way, and make the way of His righteousness smooth and unambiguous; so, David asks God to **“make straight your way before me”**. We need the Lord to make His path straight so that we do not mistakenly stray onto the wrong path, out of His righteousness. Satan loves to muddy the waters, to put up a smoke screen, so as to confuse us in order to deceitfully lead us into sin. To ask the Lord to make His way straight before us is a prayer we would all do well to pray.

Note that it is the Lord’s way that David asks to make straight, not his own. We all have our view of the way our path should take, but we need to seek God’s path. In fact, a good prayer is to ask that God throw obstacles into *our* way, so as to make clear to us *His* way.

The third reason David’s prayer will be heard is because of the depravity of his adversaries. His enemies are ripe for judgment. In verses 9 and 10, as before, David enumerates seven traits of his enemies: **“not a word from their mouth can be trusted”**, **“a heart filled with destruction”**, **“their throat is an open grave”**, a deceitful tongue, full of **“intrigues”**, **“many sins”**, and in rebellion.

Three of these traits have to do with his enemies’ speech: **“not a word from their mouth can be trusted”**, **“their throat is an open grave”**, and **“with their tongue they speak deceit”**. This is in contrast to David, who used his speech to pray to the Lord **“morning by morning”**. Indeed, so much of the depravity in the world is expressed in speech. As Jesus pointed out: **“For out of the overflow of the heart the mouth speaks”** (Matt. 12:34). David’s expression, **“their throat is an open grave,”**—suggesting the stench of the decomposing dead—is an apt description of so much of the conversation in the world.

Paul cites some of the elements of this description when he describes the depravity of *all* men, including you and me, in Romans 3: **“There is no one righteous, not even one; there is no one who understands, no one who seeks God. All have turned away, they have together become worthless; there is no one who does good, not even one. Their throats are open graves; their tongues practice deceit. The poison of vipers is on their lips”** (Rom. 3:10-13). The fact that we too are guilty of these things proves that to be reconciled to God, we need a new nature: we need to be born again.

David goes on to ask that the Lord **“declare them guilty”** (vs. 10). There comes a time when God’s judgment must be consummated, in order that He preserve His righteousness. Though all of us are depraved, God has provided a way for us to walk in His righteousness. If we reject that way, which is through Jesus Christ, we will eventually experience God’s wrath, as He carries out His judgment. To ignore or reject God’s way to righteousness is the height of rebellion against God. David desires that his enemies own **“intrigues be their downfall”** (vs. 10). Many times,

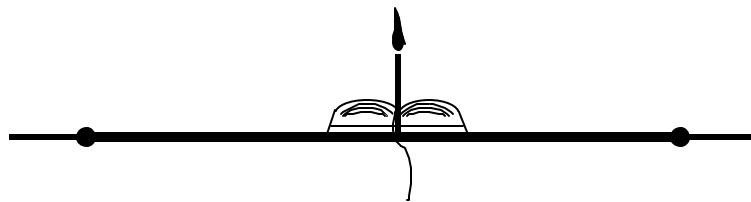
the Lord need only allow the wicked to continue in their own wicked ways and judgment will naturally befall them.

In this final section, David cites the fourth reason that his prayer will be answered: God blesses and protects His people. David begins by saying: **“But let all who take refuge in you be glad; let them ever sing for joy.”** Indeed, as people of God, we should be glad! For some reason, “in this world those who have the least right to rejoice often seem to be the most merry; and those who have the greatest cause of joy often seem to be the most sad.” [Plumer] We have great cause to **“sing for joy”**, and so we should do so every chance we get.

Indeed, there are times when we, like David, are driven to cry out to the Lord, but there will come a time when we will have nothing but happiness, our joy being fulfilled. Those of the world may laugh now, but later they will weep. We may weep now, but only for a time. In the end, we will have joy unbounded for eternity.

In fact, our joy should transcend the temporary trials that we experience in this life. James says: **“Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds”** (James 1:2) and Peter adds: **“Rejoice that you participate in the sufferings of Christ, so that you may be overjoyed when his glory is revealed”** (I Pet. 4:13). The joy and praise of God’s people through trials is a great witness to the truth of Christianity. Fortunately, throughout history, many of God’s people have maintained their joy even through the worst of circumstances. “The most exultant anthems ever sung on this earth are the songs of God’s people passing through the wilderness, the fire and the floods.” [Plumer]

Knowing of the joy of God’s people, even despite living in this ungodly world among those who curse God, David concludes: **“For surely, O LORD, You bless the righteous; You surround them with Your favor as with a shield”** (vs. 12). Yes, we may face trials here living among the ungodly; nevertheless, we are under God’s blessing and shield. We can rejoice that we face nothing but what He allows us to face. We can rejoice that the worst we can face on earth, the death of our bodies, will only result in our eternal joy.



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