

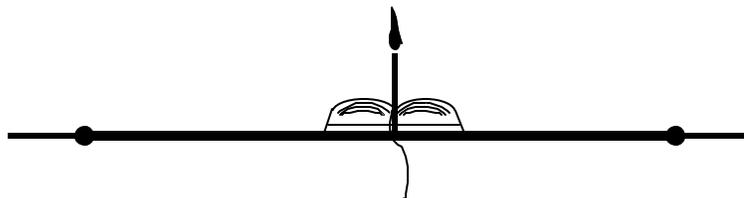
Scripture Studies

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

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May God bless you as you study His Word.



Old Testament Study: Genesis 2:4-25

The Breath of Life

⁴This is the account of the heavens and the earth when they were created.

When the LORD God made the earth and the heavens, ⁵no shrub of the field had yet appeared on the earth and no plant of the field had yet sprung up; the LORD God had not sent rain on the earth and there was no man to work the ground, ⁶but streams came up from the earth and watered the whole surface of the ground. ⁷And the LORD God formed man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and man became a living being.

⁸Now the LORD God had planted a garden in the east, in Eden; and there He put the man He had formed. ⁹And the LORD God made all kinds of trees grow out of the ground—trees that were pleasing to the eye and good for food. In the middle of the garden were the tree of life and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.

¹⁰A river watering the garden flowed from Eden, and from there it divided; it had four headstreams. ¹¹The name of the first is the Pishon; it winds through the entire land of Havilah, where there is gold.

¹²(The gold of that land is good; aromatic resin and onyx are also there.) ¹³The name of the second river is the Gihon; it winds through the entire land of Cush. ¹⁴The name of the third river is the Tigris; it runs along the east side of Asshur. And the fourth river is the Euphrates.

¹⁵The LORD God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it. ¹⁶And the LORD God commanded the man, “You are free to eat from any tree in the garden; ¹⁷but you must not eat from the tree of knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat of it you will surely die.”

After the account of the whole creation in chapter one, emphasis now focuses on man: the circumstances of his creation, the laying out of his purpose, and the foundation of his relationship to God. This, indeed, is the intent of the Bible: to chronicle God’s dealing with man and the history of man’s relationship to God.

Along these lines, Moses uses the name “LORD” in this chapter in addition to “God”, the designation he used in chapter one. The name “God” (“Elohim” in Hebrew) denotes the majesty of the all-powerful God of the creation. Thus, since chapter one chronicles the creation of the universe, Moses used “God” to designate the Creator. The name “LORD” (“YHWH” in Hebrew) denotes the care and concern of the covenant God, the personal God of His people. Since Genesis 2 focuses on the

beginnings of man's relationship with God, it is appropriate that "LORD" be used.

"YHWH" (translated "LORD" with all capital letters in the NIV) is actually the name of God. The scribes of the Bible, showing respect for the name of God, would not write His entire name out. They only wrote the consonants "YHWH". Thus, we do not actually know the full spelling and pronunciation of His name. Some pronounce it "Jehovah", some "Yahweh".

Since the locale of this chapter is the Garden of Eden, Moses covers again the creation of plant life, with emphasis on the plants that would make up the garden. He first relates that initially, though presumably the seed was in the soil, no plant life had emerged because there was no irrigation yet. Then, Moses points out that there was no man to tend the plants, implying that, even with irrigation, the emerging plants would not form a true garden. Thus, Moses establishes that there are three necessary elements needed to produce and maintain a garden: good soil (the foundation that allows the existence of the plants), appropriate climate (the environment that determines the abundance of the plants), and cultivation (the care that determines the usefulness of the plants).

I point this out because farming is often used in parables and illustrations in the Bible. Here, by analogy, we can see the elements needed for successful service of God. The first need is good soil, the God-given foundation that makes the service possible. This takes the form of God-given talents and abilities of those involved in the service. The second need is the appropriate climate. This is comparable to the constant involvement and work of God necessary for the success of the service. The third need is the cultivation. This, of course, is the work and care provided by those serving.

Indeed, gardening (or farming) is an appropriate first occupation for man. The farmer is effectively a business partner with God. So much of the farmer's success depends on the cooperation of climate and nature, which are under the control of God. In fact, God, in effect, commanded the Jewish farmers to depend on God's providence by instituting the Sabbath year (Lev. 25:1-7). Every seven years, the Jews were commanded to let the land rest. Thus, they had to trust God to give them enough reserves during the sixth year so that they could let the land rest for the seventh year.

Farming is often used as an analogy for the work of serving God. Jesus said, "**The harvest is plentiful but the workers are few**" (Matt. 9:37). Paul told the church at Corinth: "**I planted the seed, Apollos watered it, but God made it grow. So neither he who plants nor he who waters is anything, but only God, who makes things grow. The man who plants and the man who waters have one purpose, and each will be rewarded according to his own labor**" (I Cor. 3:6-8). James, when speaking of the Lord's coming, says that we are to follow the example of a

patient farmer and depend on the Lord's providence and timing: **"See how the farmer waits for the land to yield its valuable crop and how patient he is for the autumn and spring rains. You too, be patient and stand firm, because the Lord's coming is near"** (James 5:7-8). See also Matt. 20:1-16 and Matt. 21:28-41 for parables that use gardening and farming as an analogy for serving the Lord.

Moses goes on to relate that **"God formed man from the dust of the ground"** (vs. 7). This is clearly incompatible with the theory of evolution. Man here is depicted as being a direct creation of God from the dust, not from the ape. Some Christians hold to the belief that God created man by way of evolution. This is not supported by the Bible.

Man uniquely among the creatures is depicted as being brought to life by the breath of God, rather than by just the word of God. Indeed, there are times when we need to be brought to life again by the breath of God. Without the breath of God, we are just another creature, flesh and bones grinding out an existence, marking time until our days are complete. But with the breath of God, we are truly alive! Jesus said, **"The Spirit gives life; the flesh counts for nothing"** (John 6:63). The Spirit of God is able to give us life, just as it brought Jesus back to life: **"And if the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead is living in you, he who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through his Spirit, who lives in you"** (Rom. 8:11). You need to be alive by the breath of God, full of the Holy Spirit. Ask the Lord to breathe the breath of life into you!

God prepared a place for Adam. **"Now, the LORD God had planted a garden in the east"** (vs. 8). God always prepares ahead for the needs of His children. He prepares a place for us, and He also prepares the path for us to take to get there. Not only this, but God also prepares us, His children, for the path He desires us to take. **"For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do"** (Eph. 2:9). We need only to stay on His path, stay in His will, seeking to do the works He has prepared. Then, eventually, we will reach the ultimate place He has prepared for us. Jesus said, **"In my Father's house are many rooms; if it were not so, I would have told you. I am going there to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am"** (John 14:2-3).

Notice that God put the man **"in the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it"** (vs. 15). So, man was given meaningful work in accordance with his abilities. Though the work was not painful toil (as would come after the fall), nevertheless, man worked, even in paradise. Likewise, man will work in heaven. Many have the mistaken view that life in heaven will be effectively meaningless, consisting of sitting around playing harps or some such thing. On the contrary, we will be given meaningful work to do in heaven. This is indicated in the Parable of the Talents in Matt. 25.

The Master (representing the Lord) says to the men who served Him faithfully: **“You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share in your master’s happiness!”** (Matt. 25:21). This suggests that the responsibility that we will be given will depend on how we served the Lord on earth. It also suggests that our work in heaven will be satisfying and enjoyable, for the servant is to share in his master’s happiness. I have no doubt that we will be given challenging, meaningful work, perfectly suited to our abilities.

God prepared the garden by planting **“all kinds of trees”**. All of the trees were **“pleasing to the eye and good for food”**, but two of the trees had special significance. One of the trees was the **“tree of life”**. There was no prohibition concerning the tree of life because, originally, Adam, being sinless, was allowed unlimited access to it. For the good of man, however, God prohibited man from eating of the **“tree of the knowledge of good and evil”**. Before his fall, man needed only this one commandment because he had no knowledge of other evils.

Knowledge of evil is, in itself, corrupting. After his fall, man, in his sinful nature, had knowledge of evil; thus, God had to provide more comprehensive commandments so that, by the law of God, man would know objectively what God considers evil. Paradoxically, the law itself is corrupting because it teaches us about what is evil and man, in his corrupt sinful nature, is tempted by what he learns from the law. Paul explains this in the book of Romans: **“Indeed, I would not have known what sin was except through the law. For I would not have known what it was to covet if the law had not said, ‘Do not covet’. But sin, seizing the opportunity afforded by the commandment, produced in me every kind of covetous desire”** (Rom. 7:7-8).

Again, because of our sinful nature, knowledge of evil is corrupting. It is also tormenting to the Christian who is trying to be obedient to the command of God. Dear friends, do your best to remain ignorant of evil! Paul says as much when he exhorts the Romans to **“be wise about what is good, and innocent about what is evil”** (Rom. 16:19). If only I could purge my mind of the evil that I have been made aware of during my existence! Try as I may to forget them, evil thoughts come to the forefront, disturbing my prayer life, disturbing my meditation on God’s Word, disturbing my worship of the Lord. As Paul laments: **“When I want to do good, evil is right there with me”** (Rom. 7:21).

The world is full of evil. It is difficult to avoid the knowledge of evil. Strive for childlike innocence! Paul exhorts: **“In regard to evil be infants”** (I Cor. 14:20). I rejoice when I do not understand the punch line of a filthy joke! It means that I have been spared the knowledge of its evil. Certainly, the commandment of God in Eden was in our best interest. If man had heeded it, we would have been spared the knowledge of good and evil, and lived forever righteous and holy.

Since God provided many trees in the garden with fruit that was

“pleasing to the eye”, the tree with the forbidden fruit should not have been enticing to Adam. Therefore, the motive for breaking the command of God could be nothing but direct rebellion against God. The commandment of God was necessary in order to make the relationship between God and man meaningful. God desires a meaningful relationship with man based on man’s obedience to his Creator. God does not force man to relate to him; He gave man a free will in this decision. To prove the relationship, God gave man a clear choice in the form of the commandment.

Note that all of the trees, including the forbidden tree, had fruit that was **“pleasing to the eye and good for food”**. Someone might say, “If God did not want man to eat from that tree, He should have made the fruit distasteful.” However, if God made the fruit distasteful, the choice would not have been meaningful, because man probably would not have chosen to eat distasteful fruit, given the abundance of good fruit. If the choice was not meaningful, then man’s relationship to God would not have been meaningful and man’s obedience would have been based on the distaste of the fruit and not on the desire to obey his creator.

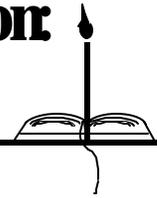
Also now, God desires a meaningful relationship with man. The temptations we face are real and enticing. If they were not, our obedience to God would not be meaningful. To please God, we must deny ourselves many pleasures of the world, with the faith that, in reward for obedience, God has greater things in store for us in the kingdom to come.

The **“tree of the knowledge of good and evil”**, and man’s reaction to it, changed the course of mankind. There is another tree that has had as much effect on mankind: Christ **“bore our sins in his body on the tree, so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness”** (I Pet. 2:24). The first tree (the tree of knowledge) brought death, the second tree (on which Christ died) brings life; the first tree brought the knowledge of sin, the second tree brings the deliverance from sin; the first tree caused man to be cast out of paradise, the second tree allows man to enter paradise; the first tree denied us access to the tree of life, the second tree allows us access again to the tree of life.

The punishment for eating from the tree with the forbidden fruit was to **“surely die”**. When man thinks of death, normally he thinks of “physical” death, man’s departure from the earth. God views death as “spiritual” death, man’s permanent separation from God. In the Bible, what we would consider death is often referred to as sleep. Speaking of Lazarus, Jesus said: **“Our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep, but I am going there to wake him up”** (John 11:11). When Jesus went to raise the ruler’s daughter from the dead, He told the crowd: **“The girl is not dead but asleep.’ But they laughed at him”** (Matt. 9:24). Indeed, We Christians should have a different view of death than the rest of the world. For them, it is the end; for us, it is our exaltation to glory, the beginning of our eternal existence in heaven. As Paul says, **“I desire to depart and be with Christ, which is better by far”** (Phil. 1:23).

A Study of Exhortation

Romans 12:4-5



The Body of Christ

⁴Just as each of us has one body with many members, and these members do not all have the same function, ⁵so in Christ we who are many form one body, and each member belongs to all the others. (Rom. 12:4,5).

These verses contain an illustration that compares the fellowship of Christians to the human body. In verse 3 of Romans 12, Paul began a series of exhortations concerning the Christian's relationship with other Christians. That verse urged the Christian to look at himself with sober judgment, not thinking too highly of himself. Then, in verses 4 through 8, Paul describes the fellowship of believers as forming one body in Christ. So, verse 3, speaking of developing a correct estimation of oneself and one's own gifts, serves as an introduction to verses 4 through 8, because the attitude encouraged in verse 3 is necessary for the successful operation of the Church as one body.

Paul speaks of the Church as being the Body of Christ in many places (see I Cor 10:17; Eph. 1:23; Col. 1:18,24; 2:19; 3:15; etc.); however, there are three major passages on the subject: I Cor. 12:12-30; Eph. 4:4-16; and the one here in Romans (Rom. 12:3-8). These passages are not redundant, but they each emphasize a different aspect of the church as the body of Christ:

1. In I Cor. 12:12-30, Paul deals with the Church as being one body organizationally, with Christ as the head and the members given specific roles to make up a structured union. Thus, he says: **“But God has combined the members of the body and has given greater honor to the parts that lacked it, so that there should be no division in the body, but that its parts should have equal concern for each other... Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it. And in the church God has appointed first of all apostles, second prophets, third teachers, then workers of miracles, also those having gifts of healing, those able to help others, those with gifts of administration,**

and those speaking in different kinds of tongues” (I Cor. 12:24-25,27-28).

2. In Eph. 4:4-16, Paul deals with the Church as being one body spiritually, unified in doctrines and beliefs. Thus, he says: **“There is one body and one Spirit—just as you were called to one hope when you were called—one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all”** (Eph. 4:4-6).

3. Here, in Romans 12:3-8, Paul deals with the Church as being one body purposefully, with each member contributing his talents and gifts according to the purpose and goal of the Head. Thus, Paul says: **“We 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. If it is serving, let him serve; if it is teaching, let him teach; if 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).

Note that Paul is not describing the unity within a single church or church denomination, but the unity within the whole Body of Christ, “the” Church, if you will. We should see ourselves, not as members of an individual church organization, but as members of the Body of Christ, united under His rulership as the Head of the Body.

Paul begins these verses by saying **“Just as...”**, thus, signaling the beginning of an illustration. Illustrations and parables are very useful in teaching the truths of God. This is why the Bible is full of illustrations, parables, types, analogies, etc. The things of heaven can seem abstract when put in heavenly terms; but when spoken in earthly terms, they become straightforward and immediately applicable.

In this case, Paul uses an illustration that is easily understandable to **“each of us”**, because, indeed, **“each of us has one body with many members”**. The interpretation of this illustration is directly at hand. We need only consider how the different parts of the body work together to keep the body alive and functioning properly. In the same way, we are to perform our duties in the service of the Head of the Body (Christ), just as the members of our body perform theirs. Each of us has a purpose and we are each vitally important for the health and survival of the Body. As a member of the Body, we must see that we do not fail to perform our well-defined role. Just as a heart must pump blood, a lung must breathe, a kidney must cleanse the blood, so we too must not neglect our duties and responsibilities to the Body of Christ.

Now, as in the human body, the **“members do not all have the same function”**. It is important that we all, by the guidance of the Spirit,

seek our proper function as a member of the Body of Christ. As Paul says in the next verse, **“We all have different gifts”** (Rom. 12:6). And elsewhere, he says: **“Are all apostles? Are all prophets? Are all teachers? Do all work miracles? Do all have gifts of healing? Do all speak in tongues? Do all interpret?”** (I Cor. 12:29-30). Indeed, **“God has arranged the parts in the body, every one of them, just as he wanted them to be”** (I Cor. 12:18).

With this in mind, the body of Christ has unity. There is no reason to envy someone else’s gifts in the service of God. It is God who has distributed them. You will be most content when you serve the Lord according to His will, for it is His Body. It is damaging to the Body when someone is not being guided by the Holy Spirit in the work of Christ. Not only does this promote disorder in the Body of Christ, but if you are not performing your assigned role, a vital function is left undone. **“If the whole body were an eye, where would the sense of hearing be? If the whole body were an ear, where would the sense of smell be?”** (I Cor. 12:17).

“So in Christ, we who are many form one body”. Since it is **“in Christ”** that we form one body, this unites us toward one goal and purpose: the goal and purpose of the Head of the Body. When strife occurs, it can be quelled by seeking the will of the Head. If we seek His will and follow it, unity will be restored. It seems strange that sinful people from so many walks of life, with varied backgrounds, from vastly different cultural backgrounds can be united in one purpose and **“form one body”**, until we realize that the union of us into one Body results from the fact that we have one Spirit dwelling in us, a Spirit that is able to bring us together in unity if we would but follow His guidance.

We not only form one body, but **“each member belongs to all the others”**. Because we belong to each other, we should readily render our services to others and accept the service of others in our works for the Lord. Furthermore, since they **“belong”** to us, we should consider precious our fellow **“members”** who are working together with us for the furtherance of the kingdom.

In summary, we must all be acutely aware of the fact that we, as Christians, are members of the same Body. Belonging to the same body rules out rivalry, stifles selfish ambition, suppresses separate interests and induces intimacy. When we were on our own, we were driven to disorder, division, self-exaltation, and apathy. However, with the awareness that we belong to the same body, we are driven to humility, charity, affinity, unity and activity.





New Testament Study: James 1:22-27

Doing What the Word Says

²²Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says. ²³Anyone who listens to the word but does not do what it says is like a man who looks at his face in a mirror ²⁴and, after looking at himself, goes away and immediately forgets what he looks like. ²⁵But the man who looks intently into the perfect law that gives freedom, and continues to do this, not forgetting what he has heard, but doing it—he will be blessed in what he does.

To hear the Word of God is a good thing, but it is not enough; so James says, **“Do not merely listen to the word”**. There is a danger in “social churchgoing”. Many **“hearers”** of the Word think that to hear is enough. They think that they are somehow doing God a favor by attending church for an hour a week. They do not apply what they hear to their lives. In some cases, they do not even accept Jesus as Lord and Savior of their lives. So, they **“deceive”** themselves: they believe they are saved by the **“hearing”**, but they are not.

Unfortunately, many pulpit ministers aid in this deceit. They do not preach the Gospel of God, but rather the gospel of man. They do not speak of the riches of God’s grace, but rather how to gain worldly riches, which, as Peter says, **“perish even though refined by fire”** (I Pet. 1:7). They do not teach the Word of God, but use the pulpit to teach their own philosophy. An indication of this is the fact that, in many churches, the members of the congregation do not even bring Bibles to church. These pulpit ministers are, in effect, putting their own message above the message found in the Bible, putting their own words above the Word of God. They are doing so to the peril of their congregation by aiding the congregation to **“deceive”** themselves. They are also doing so to their own peril. As James says later: **“Not many of you should presume to be teachers, my brothers, because you know that we who teach will be judged more strictly”** (James 3:1).

Rather than just hearing the Word, we are to **“Do what it says”**.

Now, what does the Word says that we are to do?:

1. Repent! The main message of the gospel of the kingdom of heaven is to repent from your sins and turn to Christ to be cleansed from your sins. John the Baptist said, **“Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near”** (Matt. 3:2). Christ Himself preached, **“Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near”** (Matt. 4:17) and **“But unless you repent, you too will perish”** (Luke 13:3). Peter preached, **“Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ so that your sins may be forgiven”** (Acts 2:38).

2. Obey! We are to obey the commandments of God. **“Fear God and keep His commandments, for this is the whole duty of man”** (Eccles. 12:13). **“This is love for God: to obey His commands. And His commands are not burdensome”** (I John 5:3).

It is the fool who hears the Word of God and does not **“do what it says”**. As Christ pointed out: **“But everyone who hears these words of mine and does not put them into practice is like a foolish man who built his house on sand. The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell with a great crash”** (Matt. 7:26-27).

Do you believe that the Bible is God’s Word? Then, **“do what it says”!** The extent that you **“do what it says”** reflects the extent to which you truly believe the Bible is God’s word. It is dangerous to be just a hearer because knowledge brings responsibility. If you hear the Word, and thus know what you should do, but do not do it, you sin: **“Anyone, then, who knows the good he ought to do and doesn’t do it, sins”** (James 4:17).

James goes on to compare the “non-doing hearer” to someone who looks at himself in a mirror and forgets what he looks like. This is all to point out that the Word of God is a mirror to the soul. The Word of God makes us aware of our sin. As Paul pointed out, by way of example: **“For I would not have known what it was to covet if the law had not said, ‘Do not covet’**” (Rom. 7:7). We think that we are “good” people, that is, in comparison to those around us. Then, we read the Sermon on the Mount (Matt. 5-7) and see how far we fall short in the eyes of God: **“Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect”** (Matt. 5:48).

Thus, the Word of God is a mirror to the soul. Looking into this mirror should cause us to change our lives. Just as after looking at your mussed up hair in a mirror would cause you to comb it, so looking at your mussed up soul in the mirror of God’s Word should cause you to straighten up your act. Self-examination should bring about change.

In verse 25, James goes on to point out that the one who looks into

the mirror of the soul, the Word of God, and then acts on what he sees, will be blessed by God. Note that the blessings will come to the one who **“looks intently”**. Looking **“intently”** implies studied meditation and diligent inquiry. It suggests not a glance, but prolonged meditation on the Word. It suggests not being satisfied with a first impression, but diligently gazing into the Word to find the full extent of its application to one’s life.

It is the **“perfect law”** into which we are to gaze intently. As David says, **“The law of the LORD is perfect, reviving the soul”** (Ps. 19:7). Indeed, God’s law is **“perfect”**. It is unchanging; it is invariable; it needs no amending, unlike man’s law. Our response to its perfection should be:

1. Value God’s law. Value it for its perfection, realizing that it was made for the good of man: **“The LORD commanded us to obey all these decrees and to fear the LORD our God, so that we might always prosper and be kept alive, as is the case today”** (Deut. 6:24).

2. Do not take from it. Realize that all of God’s law is perfect, not just the parts that you agree with! **“See that you do all I command you”** (Deut. 12:32).

3. Do not add to it. To add to the law is to add man’s imperfection to God’s perfection. **“Every word of God is flawless;... Do not add to His words, or He will rebuke you and prove you a liar”** (Prov. 30:5,6).

James describes the law as the law that **“gives freedom”**. The law gives us freedom from our own lusts and desires. Satan, along with the desires he fosters, is a prison warden. As Paul says, sinners should repent so **“that they will come to their senses and escape from the trap of the devil, who has taken them captive to do his will”** (II Tim. 2:26). For some reason, many think that they are free if they ignore the law. On the contrary, **“the evil deeds of a wicked man ensnare him; the cords of his sin hold him fast”** (Prov. 5:22). And Christ says, **“I tell you the truth, everyone who sins is a slave to sin”** (John 8:34). Moreover, Peter adds that **“a man is a slave to whatever has mastered him”** (II Peter 2:19). Thus, we must strive to be mastered by God’s perfect law, rather than sin: **“Don’t you know that when you offer yourselves to someone to obey him as slaves, you are slaves to the one whom you obey—whether you are slaves to sin, which leads to death, or to obedience, which leads to righteousness?”** (Rom. 6:16).

The man who will be **“blessed in what he does”** is the one who, not only **“looks intently into the perfect law”**, but also does not **“forget what he has heard”**. In order to keep from forgetting, do the following [Manton, 167-168]:

1. Pay attention to the teaching of the Word. Attention brings retention.
2. Love the Word. "Men remember what they care for: an old man will not forget where he laid his bag of gold" [Manton, 167].
3. Apply what you hear to your own life. We remember what concerns us.
4. Meditate on the Word, so as to store it in your heart.
5. Put it into practice. Direct experience will foster remembrance.
6. Reflect on how application of the Word has worked in past. Lessons learned will foster remembrance.
7. Most importantly, commit the hearing of the Word to the Spirit for your remembrance. Pray that the Holy Spirit would aid you in applying it to your life.

In summary, many over the years have heard the Word of God, pondered the Word of God, and discussed the Word of God. However, the Word was not primarily given to us for philosophical meditation, but for action. **"Do what it says!"**

True Religion

²⁶If anyone considers himself religious and yet does not keep a tight rein on his tongue, he deceives himself and his religion is worthless. ²⁷Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself from being polluted by the world.

Here, James describes true religion. The word for **"religion"** that James uses here "signifies religion in its external aspect, religious worship, especially the ceremonial service of religion." [Vine, *Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words*] In other words, James is speaking of the outward manifestation of true Christianity. So James, in effect, is describing the actions through which a Christian's religion is displayed to the world.

Here James is addressing the one who **"considers himself"** religious. We are much in our own eyes. We must cultivate the ability to examine ourselves and our actions objectively in order to gain a correct estimation of ourselves. **"If anyone thinks he is something when he is nothing, he deceives himself. Each one should test his own actions. Then he can take pride in himself"** (Gal. 6:3,4). **"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” (Rom. 12:3).

The first test of true religion that James gives is keeping a **“tight rein on the tongue”**. This is the first of many exhortations in the Epistle of James concerning controlling one’s speech (2:12; 3:2; 3:5-12; 4:11; 4:13; 5:9; 5:12). There are also many Proverbs that deal with incorrect speech: **“When words are many, sin is not absent, but he who holds his tongue is wise”** (Prov. 10:19); **“A man of knowledge uses words with restraint,...Even a fool is thought wise if he keeps silent, and discerning if he holds his tongue”** (Prov. 17:27,28); etc.[See also Prov. 11:13; 13:3; 14:23; 15:1; 21:23; 25:23; etc.] Christ warned about careless speaking: **“But I tell you that men will have to give account on the day of judgment for every careless word they have spoken. For by your words you will be acquitted, and by your words you will be condemned”** (Matt. 12:36,37). Why does the Bible put such emphasis on controlling the tongue? [Adapted from Manton, 170-171]:

1. It is the chief way we interact with others. The primary means that people determine “who we are” is from what we say to them.
2. It is so easy to stumble with the tongue, yet so hard to rectify once done.
3. Stumbling with the tongue seems such a small sin, but, in fact, can be extremely destructive.
4. There are so many ways to stumble with the tongue: derision, mockery, gossip, lying, slander, boasting, obscenity, blasphemy, etc.
5. The tongue is the tool of hypocrites. How many times have you heard of someone: “Oh, he just talks the talk, but doesn’t walk the walk”?
6. The tongue reflects the heart; control the tongue and odds are that your heart is in the right place. Thus, James says later: **“If anyone is never at fault in what he says, he is a perfect man, able to keep his whole body in check”** (James 3:2). And Christ points out: **“For out of the overflow of the heart the mouth speaks”** (Matt. 12:34).

As he did in v. 22, James points out an example of someone who **“deceives himself”**. In this case, self-examination concerning what you say will keep you from deceiving yourself. Do you use profanity? Do you gossip? Do you lie? Do you deride others? To the extent that you do, as James says, your **“religion is worthless”**. Ask the Lord to help you to **“keep a tight rein on your tongue”**.

The religion that counts is not what we consider as true religion, but **“religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless”**. As far as religion goes, it does not matter what men think. You can “act” like other Christians, and “speak” like other Christians, but God sees the heart. We

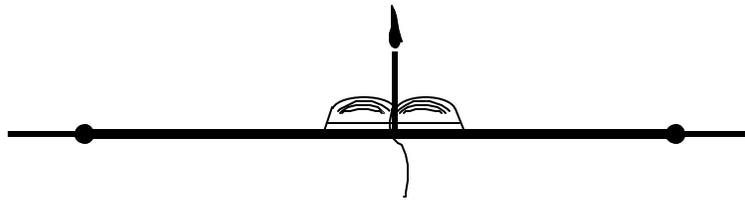
must be careful because pretended religion can have eternal consequences: **“Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven”** (Matt. 7:21).

James goes on to indicate a second work that tests true religion: **“to look after orphans and widows in their distress”**. So, true religion involves not only restraint (as in matters of the tongue), but action (as in charity towards orphans and widows). True religion manifests itself in good deeds. James covers this theme in detail in chapter 2.

Charity toward **“orphans and widows”** is representative of charity toward those who, in general, are not closely related to us. We are to love all believers as brothers, not just our close acquaintances and family members. Charity toward **“orphans and widows”** is also representative of charity toward those who are most needy. **“Orphans and widows”**, in general, have no close family members and, thus, need most the help of their extended church family.

The third test of true religion that James points out is **“to keep oneself from being polluted by the world”**. God desires not only good deeds, but holiness as well. This is so that our charity can be seen by others as work for God and by God. However, it is difficult to walk in the world without being tainted by it, filth being so prevalent. Treat the world as refuse. Wash yourself after touching the world. As Paul says: **“Let us purify ourselves from everything that contaminates body and spirit, perfecting holiness out of reverence for God”** (II Cor. 7:1).

Now, Father, cleanse from the filth of the world and, by Your Spirit, keep us from being polluted by the world. Give us the desire and opportunity to do your work on earth so that we may be truly religious in Your sight. Guide us in being doers of Your Word, faithfully serving You. In the name of Jesus we ask these things, Amen.





A Study in Psalms: Psalm 4

Psalm 4

For the director of music. With stringed instruments
A psalm of David.

¹Answer me when I call to you,
O my righteous God.
Give me relief from my distress;
be merciful to me and hear my prayer.

²How long, O men,
will you turn My glory into shame?
How long will you love delusions
and seek false gods? *Selah*

³Know that the LORD has set apart
the godly for Himself;
The LORD will hear when I call to Him.

⁴In your anger do not sin;
when you are on your beds,
search your hearts and be silent *Selah*

⁵Offer right sacrifices and trust in the LORD

⁶Many are asking,
"Who can show us any good?"
Let the light of Your face shine upon us, O LORD.

⁷You have filled my heart with greater joy
than when their grain and new wine abound.

⁸I will lie down and sleep in peace,
for You alone, O LORD,
make me dwell in safety.

In this Psalm, David seeks hope for the future by turning to God in prayer. As prayer should be, this prayer is a dialogue between the one who is praying (David) and God. Also, as often happens in prayer, the one praying was initially distressed, but, through prayer, acquired God's peace.

From the inscription, we learn that David wrote this psalm for "**the director of music**". David understood the importance of music in the

worship of God, as evidenced by the many psalms of music that he wrote. Music enables us to express praise and worship to God that mere words cannot convey. The goodness of God often transcends our vocabulary; the depth of His mercy cannot be described. Yet our worship through music can involve our whole body and being, so that our worship reaches beyond the words we speak. What a thrill it would be to hear the inspired music that David wrote to accompany his psalms. I am sure his music would serve to interpret his psalms better than the most exhaustive scholarly commentary.

David's Plea

¹Answer me when I call to you,
O my righteous God.
Give me relief from my distress;
be merciful to me and hear my prayer.

In this verse, David, in his seemingly hopeless situation, states his plea. He cries out for God to answer his prayer in his time of need. We are fortunate that David faced many trials, because, through them, he wrote many Psalms that bring us encouragement, comfort and instruction in our time of trouble. David turned to God in his time of distress. We face trials and troubles of many kinds, but there is only one God who can give us comfort and relief through them all.

David addressed the Lord as his “**righteous God**”. It was, most certainly, the ungodly who caused David so much distress. So here, David is asking of God something that is consistent with His nature: to protect the righteous and punish the wicked. As David pointed out in Psalm 1: “**For the LORD watches over the way of the righteous, but the way of the wicked will perish**” (Psalm 1:6). We are always on safe ground asking God something that is consistent with His nature. On the other hand, it is an affront to come to God for any request that is not a righteous request. Such a request cannot be answered; it is contrary to God's nature to answer such a request.

David's specific request is for “**relief from [his] distress**”. David realized that for a righteous God to answer his prayer would be an act of mercy, so he asks, in the same breath, for God to “**be merciful**”. Indeed, all of us need God's mercy: the rich and the poor, the proud and the humble, the best and the worst.

David then ended his request by saying “**hear my prayer**”. David did not say this because he thought that there was a chance that God would not be aware of his prayer, or that God would be asleep, or some such thing. God literally hears all prayers. But David wanted more than God to be just aware of his prayer. David wanted positive feedback concerning his prayer, observable evidence in response to the prayer, preferably in the form of deliverance from his distress.

We all desire concrete, tangible proof that our prayers have been heard. Moreover, we desire that the result of the answered prayer be exactly as we have asked, as if we know the best way to resolve the situation. And when the answer to the prayer does not come about exactly as we had desired, we lose faith and wonder: "Did God really hear my prayer?" But God is not fickle. If He hears one prayer, He hears them all. Whatever the resolution, His will is done. In prayer, rather than attempt to persuade God that we know exactly how to resolve the situation, we should seek to discover and to be content with God's perfect resolution of the situation.

God's Response

²How long, O men,
will you turn My glory into shame?
How long will you love delusions
and seek false gods? *Selah*

³Know that the LORD has set apart
the godly for Himself;
the LORD will hear when I call to Him.

⁴In your anger do not sin;
when you are on your beds,
search your hearts and be silent *Selah*

Here, God responds to David's cry by stating the problem, in general, with man. Man turns the "glory" of God into "shame"; man "loves delusions and seeks false gods". Man's sin is the primary reason that the prayers of men are not heard: "**But your iniquities have separated you from your God; your sins have hidden His face from you, so that He will not hear**" (Isa. 59:2) and "**If I had cherished sin in my heart, the Lord would not have listened**" (Ps. 66:18). Man's chief sin is the rejection of Christ and the rejection of Christ is the chief manner in which man turns God's glory into shame.

The question posed is "**How long?**" The posing of the question, in itself, demonstrates God's long-suffering and forbearance. God could righteously judge us immediately but, instead, He asks "**How long?**" in order to give man a chance to repent so that He can save him. The answer to the question "**How long?**" is each man's choice. Each man can choose to repent in his lifetime and turn to God by accepting the forgiveness of sin available through Jesus Christ and, in doing so, receive the benefit of God's forbearance, which is eternal life; or he can choose not to repent and, in doing so, reject God's long-suffering mercy, a decision which has eternal consequences in hell.

Instead of accepting Christ, men "**love delusions**". They reject Christ and seek happiness and fulfillment in the things of this perishing world. They continually deceive themselves. Men from all stages and walks of life

strive after things that they believe will lead to a happy and fulfilled life. “The young expect to find it when grown up and their own masters. Parents, when their children are settled and provided for. The merchant, when wealth is acquired and independence secured. The laborer, when his day’s or week’s toil is ended. The ambitious, in gaining power and reputation. The covetous, in gaining money to supply all his wants. The lover of pleasure in earthly enjoyment. The sick, in health. The student, in gaining knowledge. The self-righteous, [in their own righteousness].” [Bickersteth, in Plumer, 75]

The result of **“loving delusions”** is, invariably, to **“seek false gods”**. Men are not content merely to reject the true and living God; they must put their hope for salvation in idols. They develop a philosophy of life that reflects their own carnal desires and serves to further their pursuit of these desires. They erect gods in their lives to worship, icons for the ruling philosophies of their lives: the god of money for the philosophy “he who dies with the most toys wins”; the god of pleasure for “eat, drink and be merry for tomorrow we die”; the god of self for “I am the master of my fate; I am the captain of my soul”. However, as God attests of Himself: **“Before me no god was formed, nor will there be one after me. I, even I, am the LORD, and apart from me there is no savior. I have revealed and saved and proclaimed—I, and not some foreign god among you”** (Isa. 43:10-11).

Despite the rebellion of man in general, God has specifically **“set apart the godly for himself”** (vs. 3). Note that it is **“the Lord”** who sets the Godly apart, not the Godly who set themselves apart. Try as we may, we cannot, by our own will, sanctify ourselves. Peter describes those who have been **“set apart”** as ones **“who have been chosen according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, through the sanctifying work of the Spirit, for obedience to Jesus Christ”** (I Pet. 1:2). This passage details who is involved in our being **“set apart”**: not us, but the three persons of the Trinity.

Note also that the Lord sets them apart **“for Himself”**. We are chosen and set apart to serve the Lord. **“For we are God’s workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do”** (Eph. 2:9). Our being chosen by God should result in our doing His work. **“What good is it, my brothers, if a man claims to have faith but has no deeds?”** (James 2:14). Our being chosen should result in a changed life, living for God rather than ourselves. Can the world tell by your behavior that you are chosen by God?

The Godly are set apart in many ways: they have accepted Christ; they are born of God; they are justified in God’s eyes; they are under God’s protection; they are in His service; they are to be glorified; etc. What an honor that the God of the universe grants us such privileges! Our being set apart in so many ways is evidence of God’s love for us. Just as we set apart things that are precious to us, so the Lord sets apart His treasure.

Since the Lord has set us apart, He certainly desires that we relate to Him through prayer; thus, to encourage this, **“the LORD will hear when I call to him”** (vs. 3). The advantage of the Godly is prayer. The Godly and the ungodly alike often have trials and troubles, but the Godly can turn to God in prayer and He will hear.

The Lord here prescribes self-inspection as a means of getting right with Him, clearing the way for Him to answer our prayers. We should examine ourselves daily and **“search our hearts”**, discovering the sin we have committed, so that we may confess it to God and be cleansed.[see I John 1:9] As suggested in this verse, a good time to examine ourselves is as we lie on our beds in the evening. When we are furthest from the haze of the world, we can see more clearly to commune with God. Then, after we discover and confess our sins to Him, we can awake in the morning at peace with God, with a clear conscience and a cleansed heart, ready to face the day in service to Him.

Indeed, any time of solitude is appropriate for self-examination. We would never be bored if we used our solitude for self-examination, repentance, confession and prayer. This work is never finished. “When ye have none to speak with, talk to yourselves. Ask yourselves for what end ye were made, what lives ye have led, what times ye have lost, what love ye have abused, what wrath ye have deserved.”[Swinnock, in Spurgeon, pg. 40]

The result of self-examination, as pointed out here, is to **“be silent”** before God. We no longer say to God, “It is my right to be blessed! You promised it! You must answer my prayers!” but rather “Have mercy on me, O God, a sinner.”

Sacrifice and Trust, then Joy and Peace

⁵Offer right sacrifices and trust in the LORD

⁶Many are asking, “Who can show us any good?”

Let the light of your face shine upon us, O LORD.

⁷You have filled my heart with greater joy than when their grain and new wine abound.

⁸I will lie down and sleep in peace, for you alone, O LORD, make me dwell in safety.

The response to the exhortation of self-examination is to **“offer right sacrifices”**. Searching our hearts makes us recognize our depravity before God, thus making us aware of the need atone for our sins by offering **“right sacrifices”** to the Lord. In the Old Testament times, atonement for sin came through the blood sacrifices prescribed in the Law. For us, Jesus’ death is the **“right sacrifice”** to make atonement for our sins; we need only to accept His sacrifice.

In addition to offering “**right sacrifices**”, we are to “**trust in the LORD**”. We are to trust that the “**right sacrifice**” will indeed atone for our sins and amend our relationship to God. Many after accepting Christ and confessing their sins still feel that God may condemn them. We must “**trust in the LORD**” that the method He prescribed for atonement is sufficient. As Paul says: “**Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus, because through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit of life set me free from the law of sin and death**” (Rom. 8:1,2).

Those who have not offered “**right sacrifices**”, realizing the depravity of man, are asking: “**Who can show us any good?**” (vs. 6). In this world, apart from God, we may find many riches, much fame, abundance of pleasure but not much good. How necessary it is that we make the plea: “**Let the light of your face shine upon us, O LORD**” (vs. 7).

The evidence that this plea of David is answered is found in verse 7, where David says: “**You have filled my heart with greater joy than when their grain and new wine abound**”. David was filled with the joy of the Lord; certainly the light of the Lord’s face was shining upon him. David realized that the pleasures of this world hold no comparison to the riches of the joys of the kingdom of God. The pleasures of this world are temporary; the joy of the Lord is eternal. The “**grain**” of the world satisfies for only a season, the Bread of Life, Jesus, satisfies for eternity. The “**new wine**” of the world brings happiness for an evening, the new wine of the Lord brings joy for eternity.

In the end, given this joy, David slept “**in peace**”, recognizing God’s protection in making him “**dwelt in safety**”. The child of God can indeed “**sleep in peace**”, and not let the cares of this world disturb them. Yes, the child of God does face trials, but the Lord says to him: “**Fear not, for I have redeemed you; I have called 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).

In summary, this Psalm can be viewed as a model of a new believer’s growth in the Lord. In verse 1, he cries out, desiring to be heard by God. Then, in verse 2, the Holy Spirit convicts him of sin. In verse 3, he realizes that one must be holy, set apart, to be one of God’s people. Next, in verse 4, through self-examination and confession of sin, he clears the way to atone for his sin. In verse 5, he accepts the right sacrifice, through Christ, and begins to trust in the Lord for his salvation. Finally, in the remaining verses, he experiences the light of the Lord, the joy of the Lord and the peace of the Lord.

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The Diversity of Scripture

"The parts of Scripture were penned by diverse secretaries, published in diverse places, in diverse ages, on diverse occasions, for diverse ends: so the argument and subject matter, the method and manner of composing, the texture and the style of writing are likewise different. Some parts of Scripture were delivered in prose, others in verse or numbers: some parts of the Scripture are historical, showing what hath been done, some are prophetic, showing what shall be done; others are dogmatical or doctrinal, showing what we must do, what we must believe. Again, some parts of Scripture are clear and easy, some are obscure and very knotty: Some parts of Scripture show what God made us, others, how sin spoiled us: A third, how Christ restored us. Some parts of Scripture show forth acts of mercy to keep us from sinking; others record acts of judgment to keep us from presuming."

-- Joseph Caryl (1602-1673)

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