

Psalm 26 • What If We Came Properly Prepared?

Introduction

We can get into a “Sunday-to-Sunday cycle”. This is where we seem to always come to church on Sundays intent on making amends for our spiritual weakness and defeat the rest of the week. We just don’t seem to be living the way that we know we should the rest of the week, so our time in church seems to be personally focused on remorse and seeking forgiveness and making yet another pledge to do better.

The Old Testament model of the tabernacle was built on the assumption that one did not come to the presence of God to **get** clean, but as **already** clean. The effects of sin are supposed to be recognized and dealt with even before one decides to journey to God’s House; and once there, to celebrate having been purified from sin’s pollution. The sacrifices were intended as the **END** of the process of recognizing, confessing, and ridding one’s self of sin, not a process in and of itself for covering up sin. The intent was for people to come into God’s presence clean, pure, and properly prepared.

What if we did the same thing today and came to church properly prepared spiritually? We’d spend far less time “celebrating” the issue of sin and freed for meaningful worship.

¹Vindicate me, O LORD, for I have
walked in my integrity,
And I have trusted in the LORD without
wavering.
²Examine me, O LORD, and try me;
Test my mind and my heart.
³For Your lovingkindness is before my
eyes,
And I have walked in Your truth.

[Read v.1-3]

Q: This appears to be quite a contraction to the type of person suffering from the “Sunday-to-Sunday cycle” described in the introduction above. What kind of person does it describe?

A: This is someone that is obedient to God’s will and ways, keeping His Word in the course of their everyday life.

Q: What are the characteristics of the person that walks according to God’s ways in the course of their everyday life?

1. “...I have walked in my integrity...” (v.1) This describes someone that responds to their conscience, not just **KNOWING** right from wrong but **DOING** it.
2. “...I have trusted in the LORD without wavering.” (v.1) This describes someone with a right heart dedicated to the fact that God’s ways are superior regardless of the circumstances and grounded in a greater reality than the pressures to ignore them.
3. “...Your lovingkindness is before my eyes...” (v.3) This describes walking in a faith that chooses to view everything according to the standard of God’s grace as opposed to employing a personal or world-based value system.
4. “...I have walked in Your truth.” (v.3) It’s the sum of the above actions combined, describing a right conscience, heart, and faith dedicated to living and following God’s Word consistently.

Q: So what is the point of the challenge in v.2 to be examined and tested?

A: It’s not a statement of pride in one’s self or accomplishments, but a request to be held accountable according to God’s minimum standards.

⁴I do not sit with deceitful men,
Nor will I go with pretenders.
⁵I hate the assembly of evildoers,
And I will not sit with the wicked.

[Read v.4-5]

Q: What is the basic contrast between someone that engages in these activities versus the person described above in v.1-3?

A: Whereas the person in v.1-3 is living according to God's ways in the course of their everyday life, the person engaging in these things is not.

Q: What are the characteristics of the person that regularly shuns God's ways?

1. They "*sit with deceitful men...*" (v.4) When the company one keeps is living a lie, it's nearly impossible for one not to begin to embrace lies themselves. There is a basic disregard for truth, much less God's Truth.
2. They "*go with pretenders.*" (v.4) Having no regard for the truth, reality gives way to one's imagination and fantasy, an act of continually seeking to be someone or something else heading further and further away from God's desire.
3. They love "*the assembly of evildoers...*" (v.5) Disregarding the truth and embracing one's own fantasies leads one to seek the company of those that are likeminded. It's another way of describing behavior that leads not just to an occasional mistake, but into a lifestyle of sin.
4. They "*sit with the wicked.*" (v.5) The journey results in arriving permanently at a new place, a place that reinforces every wrong thing associated with sin.

Point: *The true contrast between the spiritually prepared person described in v.1-3 and the spiritually defeated described in v.4-5 is where they choose to live, with whom they choose to associate, and whether they spend more time and resources living according to God's Truth or their own desire.*

Application: *When someone struggles from Sunday-to-Sunday, is it possibly due to spending so little time outside church walking in Christ? Is the repeated struggle with sin due to never leaving sin's strongholds—the people and places where sin has the most influence over us?*

⁶I shall wash my hands in innocence,
And I will go about Your altar, O LORD,
⁷That I may proclaim with the voice of
thanksgiving
And declare all Your wonders.

[Read v.6-7]

Q: What is the dual meaning of the statement, "I shall wash my hands in innocence"?

A: Part of the preparation for the ceremonies taking place in the tabernacle were physical washing to symbolize inward purity by inducing outward cleanliness. In this case, to wash "*in innocence*" is a way of describing someone that has been obedient and therefore spiritually pure in heart and deeds **BEFORE** they even undertake the purification rituals as part of the activities around the altar of God's House. It's someone that is living rightly **PRIOR** to coming before God's presence.

Point: *Although we may need to come to God for forgiveness and reconciliation, His primary desire is that we live right as a matter of normal living each and every day, so that in coming before Him our focus is not on sin and failure but praise and thanksgiving and, therefore, success.*

⁸O LORD, I love the habitation of Your house
And the place where Your glory dwells.
⁹Do not take my soul away along with sinners,
Nor my life with men of bloodshed,
¹⁰In whose hands is a wicked scheme,
And whose right hand is full of bribes.
¹¹But as for me, I shall walk in my integrity;
Redeem me, and be gracious to me.
¹²My foot stands on a level place;
In the congregations I shall bless the LORD.

[Read v.8-12]

Q: What ultimately happens to those who never relinquish a lifestyle of sin?

A: According to v.9-10, they lose not just their life but their soul.

Q: What ultimately happens to those that choose a lifestyle of righteousness?

A: Redemption and grace. (v.11) This further results in stability—“My foot stands on a level place”—so that one lives consistently according to God’s ways every day, not just occasionally.

Overall Application

- *What is the ultimate solution to breaking the cycle of sin? What needs to take place **BETWEEN** weekly church services?*
- *What are the places you need to stop visiting? Who are the people with whom you shouldn’t associate? Where are the strongholds of sin and with what will you replace them?*
- *Do you see that as pleased as God may be that you seek forgiveness of sin, how much more pleased it would make Him if you desired to come to Him innocent in the first place? What should your goal be for your heart and mind and faith whenever you have the opportunity to assemble together with other Believers?*