

Living Godly in an Ungodly World

From the Perspective of Psalm 37

- ¹ *Do not fret because of evildoers,
Be not envious toward wrongdoers.*
- ² *For they will wither quickly like the grass
And fade like the green herb.*
- ³ *Trust in the Lord and do good;
Dwell in the land and cultivate faithfulness.*
- ⁴ *Delight yourself in the Lord;
And He will give you the desires of your heart.*
- ⁵ *Commit your way to the Lord,
Trust also in Him, and He will do it.*
- ⁶ *He will bring forth your righteousness as the light
And your judgment as the noonday.*
- ⁷ *Rest in the Lord and wait patiently for Him;
Do not fret because of him who prospers in his way,
Because of the man who carries out wicked schemes.*
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- ³⁴ *Wait for the Lord and keep His way,
And He will exalt you to inherit the land;
When the wicked are cut off, you will see it.*

Psalms 37:1-7, 34 NASU

The Believer, having been born of Christ (1John 2:29), is spiritually separated from the world (John 17:15-16). When a person becomes a Christian not only does his or her disposition toward the things of the world change (1John 2:15), but the dispositions of those of the world toward the new persons in Christ also change. The world is said to hate Christians in John 15:19; 17:14. This is in contrast to the world loving its own (John 15:19). In 1 John 3:1 following the regeneration (new birth) of an individual, it is said that the world does not know Believers because the world does not know Christ. These two differences address the world's attitude (hatred) toward and relationship (not knowing) with the Believer. Now consider the area of communication. The world listens to those who are from the world (1 John 4:5). The world does not listen (In the sense of hearing truth) to those who are born of God (1 John 4:6). Compare these verses with John 1:10-11; 3:19-21, and 1 Corinthians 2:14.

It is the duty of every believer as far as it depends on us to be at peace with all men (Rm. 12:18). Nevertheless, because of the conditions cited above, the Christian desiring to live godly in Christ Jesus will experience persecution (2 Timothy 3:12). This was true for believers in the Old Testament as well as the New Testament and even up to this day and will continue into the final days of this present world. As an illustration, compare the time shortly after the fall (Genesis 4: 1-10; 1 John 3:12) and the final time of this world (Revelation 20:7-9).

Nevertheless, God commands His people to live godly in an ungodly world (Pr. 2 and 1Peter 1:13-16). Such a condition calls for intense discipline on the part of God's people as they contend against their own flesh when confrontations with those of the world occur.

The 37th Psalm opens assuming the reality of such confrontations and provides instructions as to handling the conflicts which result from living godly in an ungodly world.

Two Kinds of conflict are in view in Psalm 37:

Private (Psalm 37:1, 7, 8)

This particular type of confrontation is very subtle and often goes unnoticed for it pertains primarily to the Saint's perception. It occurs when believers see the wicked prospering in the present world and then evaluate their success by temporal standards. Doing so provides the flesh an opportunity to exalt itself thus thrusting the believer into a private conflict characterized by anger and/or envy and/or bitterness.

Public (Psalm 37:12-14, 32)

This form of conflict is often but not always overt persecution. It involves the ungodly attacking either directly or indirectly those who belong to Christ. This too can excite the flesh to bitterness which can cause further private anger and if not addressed in the light of God's truth additional public conflict as well.

This battle is illustrated in Psalm 73 where Asaph, the leader of King David's choir conveys his experience. He cites a time in his life when after examining the prosperity of the wicked he became envious (Ps. 73:2-3) and then bitter (73:10-15). This condition caused him great trial and even calloused before the Lord (73:21-22). It was not until he entered the sanctuary of God that he gained understanding (73:17).

In order to overcome and avoid both forms of conflict the Lord must be the center of the believer's attention, the Lord is to be preeminent. Psalm 37 conveys the need for the preeminence of the Lord in the life of the believer as it exhorts the believer to:

➤ **Trust in the Lord (vs. 3, 5b)**

Believers are always in everything to rely on the Lord. Particularly, as we live in a world where evil is pervasive we are to trust in the fact that God in His sovereignty is working all things after the counsel of His will. We may not understand how or the immediate reasons behind what happens but we know that it transpires within the context of God's sovereignty and are to trust Him.

We have no reason to doubt God and therefore no reason to capitulate to fret or envy and resort to evil. Instead, as the verse continues, we are to do good. We are to go about our lives (dwell in the land) cultivating faithfulness. The last part of verse 3 could pertain to feeding on God's faithfulness as in trusting Him or to God's people cultivating faithfulness in their own lives. Either way, we are not to resort to evil.

➤ **Delight in the Lord (v. 4)**

The root meaning of the Hebrew word translated "Delight" means to be *soft* or *pliable*. In the context of Ps. 37 it conveys the idea of honoring God so as to be molded by Him instead of being molded by the flesh which makes one fret and envious (v. 1). When the believer honors the Lord, the Lord, as promised in this verse, molds into the heart of the believer righteous desires. Desires that are a contrast to that of envy.

➤ **Commit your way to the Lord, trust also in Him (v. 5a)**

As God works in the lives of His people molding into them desires that honor Him they are to commit their course of life (*way*) unto Him. As they do they can trust that He will bring forth their righteousness as the light and their judgment as the noonday (v. 6).

➤ **Rest in the Lord (v. 7a)**

The Hebrew word translated *rest* means *to put to silence*. In this case it conveys the quiet or peaceful nature of trust in the Lord as opposed to fretting and being angry. We are to be at peace in the Lord.

- **Wait patiently for the Lord (vs. 7b, 34)**
Being at peace with the Lord is not inactivity. They trust Him and are to wait patiently for Him. Because the Lord loves justice (v. 28) He will minister to His people in time of trial (vs. 23-24) and ensure they inherit the land forever (vs. 9, 11, 18, 22, 29, 34, 37, 39-40) and He will bring an end to the wicked (vs. 9-10, 15, 20, 22b, 35-36, 38).

- **Keep the Lord's way (v. 34b)**
Resting in the Lord and waiting on Him does not mean for the believer to be inactive or passive when it comes to evil. Instead, as we wait for the Lord, we are to keep His way. We are to obey His Word. As Asaph in Psalm 73, we are to come to the sanctuary of the Lord. Our lives are to be governed by the principles of His Word so that our responses to the evil of the world honor the Lord. And we will see the Lord vindicate His Name.