

The Garden

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Psalm 1

1 ¶ Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the wicked, nor stands in the way of sinners, nor sits in the seat of scoffers;

2 but his delight is in the law of the LORD, and on his law he meditates day and night.

3 He is like a tree planted by streams of water, that yields its fruit in its season, and its leaf does not wither. In all that he does, he prospers.

4 ¶ The wicked are not so, but are like chaff which the wind drives away.

5 Therefore the wicked will not stand in the judgment, nor sinners in the congregation of the righteous;

6 for the LORD knows the way of the righteous, but the way of the wicked will perish.

(RSV)

Psalm 19

To the choirmaster.

A Psalm of David.

1 ¶ The heavens are telling the glory of God; and the firmament proclaims his handiwork.

2 Day to day pours forth speech, and night to night declares knowledge.

3 There is no speech, nor are there words; their voice is not heard;

4 yet their voice goes out through all the earth, and their words to the end of the world. In them he has set a tent for the sun,

5 which comes forth like a bridegroom leaving his chamber, and like a strong man runs its course with joy.

6 Its rising is from the end of the heavens, and its circuit to the end of them; and there is nothing hid from its heat.

7 ¶ The law of the LORD is perfect, reviving the soul; the testimony of the LORD is sure, making wise the simple;

8 the precepts of the LORD are right, rejoicing the heart; the commandment of the LORD is pure, enlightening the eyes;

9 the fear of the LORD is clean, enduring for ever; the ordinances of the LORD are true, and righteous altogether.

10 More to be desired are they than gold, even much fine gold; sweeter also than honey and drippings of the honeycomb.

11 Moreover by them is thy servant warned; in keeping them there is great reward.

12 But who can discern his errors? Clear thou me from hidden faults.

13 Keep back thy servant also from presumptuous sins; let them not have dominion over me! Then I shall be blameless, and innocent of great transgression.

14 Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable in thy sight, O LORD, my rock and my redeemer.

(RSV)

Romans 1

16 ¶ For I am not ashamed of the gospel: it is the power of God for salvation to every one who has faith, to the Jew first and also to the Greek.

17 For in it the righteousness of God is revealed through faith for faith; as it is written, "He who through faith is righteous shall live."

18 For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and wickedness of men who by their wickedness suppress the truth.

19 ¶ For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them.

20 Ever since the creation of the world his invisible nature, namely, his eternal power and deity, has been clearly perceived in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse;

21 for although they knew God they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking and their senseless minds were darkened.

22 Claiming to be wise, they became fools,

23 and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man or birds or animals or reptiles.

24 Therefore God gave them up in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, to the dishonoring of their bodies among themselves,

25 because they exchanged the truth about God for a lie and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed for ever! Amen. (RSV)

Philippians 4

4 Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, Rejoice.

5 Let all men know your forbearance. The Lord is at hand.

6 Have no anxiety about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God.

7 And the peace of God, which passes all understanding, will keep your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

8 Finally, brethren, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is gracious, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things.

9 What you have learned and received and heard and seen in me, do; and the God of peace will be with you. (RSV)

Some people believe that starting from themselves they can determine God.¹ I mean they think they can determine whether God exists or not. They can also determine how God should be. Many of those who believe that the only valid way to come to truth is by starting with themselves will reject what I say. Yet I believe it may be profitable to those who believe in the God of the Bible to reiterate a Biblical frame work regarding knowing Truth and remaining within it while we seek more mature understanding.

The Objectivity of God

Objectivity and subjectivity are two terms which deserve some treatment in the discussion about the nature of God. The understanding of these terms is fundamental to comprehending concepts such as judgment, sin, responsibility, and revelation, to name a few.

Objectivity according to is an adverb of the word objective. The definition of the word we are concerned with here is, “expressing or dealing with facts or conditions as perceived without distortion by personal feelings, prejudices, or interpretations”²

Subjectivity, an adverb of subjective, according to the same source refers to “arising out of or identified by means of one's perception of one's own states and processes”³

Both of these terms refer to perception. This involves a self. The issue is not then the self but rather the level of distortion of the self's perception. Some philosophies hold that the mere introduction of a self distorts, hence there can be no objectivity, because the self filters.

This approach to knowing makes important assumptions about self. The self must not only perceive, but filter, because the object is other than the self. As finite beings we are contained in our perceptions, just like a fly. As the fly sees an object through its eye differently than a person (or so we suspect), it does not fully see the object as it could be seen through various eyes (distortions). Each distortion may contain some truth about the object, but not the whole truth. The distortion comes through the filter, which is by definition a distorter. In essence the perception is wrong at some level.

When we speak about God and objectivity I think that above analysis of self fails from a biblical perspective. Although God is presented as having a will, He is also presented as all knowing (Isaiah 46: 8 – 11). God is unique. He is not an extension of man. He does not see things through a filter, although they are distinct from Him. It is as if God observes all aspects at the same time, like the four creatures of Revelations 4:6 – 8. It is His omniscience that allows us to say He is objective. (Psalm 51:4 and Romans 3:3 -4)

If a person says this can't be then He is operating from his perceptions of reality, which he admits are flawed, but which he is saying at some level can operate without distortions. If at some level he can operate without distortion, why is there no place of perfect perception? If there is distortion in all the self's perception how can he speak with such confidence regarding God's nature. It would seem He must be silent on the subject. It is no valid attack or defense for the person to say such perception is not within his experience because that is his perception, which is admittedly limited and hence flawed.

¹ This is certainly a difficult position to sustain, if no other reason than our finiteness and the impacts of our environment upon us prior to starting the attempt. Also our process of reason seems to have been given to us and that is constraint on our investigative undertaking, whose necessity we can't prove.

² From <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/objective> definition 3a 4/24/2012

³ From <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/subjective> definition 4c 4/24/2012

While I admit that what I have said does not itself prove the objectivity of God, it does make a case that such objectivity can't be denied without the objector undermining himself at some level.

The Responsibility of God

Next it is important to address the argument that if God is omniscient then He is responsible for not only the world's good, but all its evil as well. Such an argument equates knowing with controlling. The Bible does not take such a position, nor is it a necessary position.

Certainly, as finite beings we are able to know outcomes that we don't control. We warn our children that engaging in certain type of activities will be harmful to them. Knowing that this is the case does not mean we controlled the outcome.

Someone will object that God spoke the world into existence and the outcome is an implication of His speaking. The concept of freewill is the response to the objection. But God created freewill so He knew the outcome continues the objection. If He knows the end from the beginning then He must have made it to end up as it did. The problem with this objection is that it is really arguing that there is no free choice. All that exists is determined. What is being said in essence is that God did not create free will.⁴

Genesis 1:26 -28 bears on this point as well as on the point of perception. Mankind is said to be created in the image of God. That is to say that while he is not God he is like God. Mankind has perception, but it is not perfect perception. By God's revelation it is enhanced⁵. Likewise, just as God can choose to act (creativity), man was given the same ability. He can really choose.

We see in the first chapters of Genesis that man's choices, although real are limited. We see that man lives in an environment and that affects His choices. Enticed by Satan man chooses poorly, but he did choose. It was for this choice man was judged.

Choice according to scripture was not just given to man. It was given to angels. Although we don't have a lot of information it appears that Satan led a rebellion against God, for which he and his companions will be punished in hell (Revelation 12:9 ; 20:2 -3).

Choice is a creative function for good or evil. Good or evil are relational terms. Good meaning toward God. Evil being away from of God.

God judges whether people are supportive of His will or opposing His will. As creator God claims an ownership over man. This means that he evaluates them. It is good to understand the meaning of the name for God in the Bible. The terms "Jehovah" and "Elohim" are instructive in this regard. Jehovah speaks of being and presence (in the sense of companion). The term "Elohim" speaks of power, in particular creative power (making occur and providing). The concept of companion, in the way it is used

⁴ This argument does have a logical deficiency if it is true. The exercise to try to persuade in any direction is meaningless since there is no choice for a person to go in. To urge that the persuasive effort is worthwhile is to betray a belief in freewill. Freewill is on the level of things such as Being, and communication. To argue against them is manifestly foolish, since one must stand in them to be comprehended.

⁵ This is the importance of the Bible as God's Word. While we accept the Bible by a process of reason related to evaluation of historical information, personal observation (Romans 1:20), and coherent explanation of our existence, it informs our reason and transcends it. It is no way inferior to our reason since it explains our reason (we were created by an intelligent being who reasons along certain line), but this intelligent being informs us about things our finite being could not know, so our reasoning is enhanced.

as regards relationship with sentient beings, does contain a moral element.⁶ Understanding this, along with the concepts of permanence (aseity) and power makes it possible to understand His judgment (for condemnation or blessing). Simply put the eternal never to be destroyed God (in any sense of the term destroyed) will not have evil, which which is destructive of His nature or purposes, survive before Him eternally. Neither will he reject Himself, so His adherents are blessed. Although many maybe troubled by these realities, I suspect it is because they do not rightly assess the eternal nature of God, His power, and His righteousness. By righteousness I include the thought of what is allowed to be in harmonious (accepted and thriving) relationship to Him. God will stand supreme over all that would be contrary to Him. That is His nature. (Isaiah 43: 10 – 11)

Although some may choose to criticize this position as “might makes right”. The scripture would reassuringly comment right has might. That is the comfort of the believer in a world of evil.

The Garden

In the book of Genesis we find that God puts man in a garden. He states that he is not to eat from the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. Adam is told he may eat of every other tree. Man has freedom, but not blessing to act contrary to God. This pattern of living under God is the constant urging of scripture.

God’s counsel as recorded in scripture is to stay within certain boundaries. It is within these boundaries, which He reveals, that one finds wholeness and proper relationship to God. This includes ones thought life. Indeed Proverbs 4:23⁷ counsels that the heart should be protected.

In contrast to the biblical view is what many in the world call education today. The idea is to be open to novel ways. The educated person is to be open to new ways of doing and looking at life. Experience in many different paths is to be prized over adherence to one.

The bible addresses this contrary view. The scripture makes this comment :

Proverbs 1

1 ¶ The proverbs of Solomon, son of David, king of Israel:

2 That men may know wisdom and instruction, understand words of insight,

3 receive instruction in wise dealing, righteousness, justice, and equity;

4 that prudence may be given to the simple, knowledge and discretion to the youth--

5 the wise man also may hear and increase in learning, and the man of understanding acquire skill,

6 to understand a proverb and a figure, the words of the wise and their riddles.

The passage calls people to gain skill in walking in a certain path, not to explore many paths. Regarding those who would seek paths alternate to what is being taught in Proverbs the hope of the book is “that

⁶ The reader may profit from reading the Elohim and Jehovah section of Nathan Stone’s Names of God copyright 1944 The Moody Bible Institute of Chicago and the Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament Vol. I . Harris, Archer, Watlke copyright 1980 The Moody Bible Institute of Chicago section 484a. Discussions of the power and moral significance of the two terms are provided.

⁷ The imagine in this verse is of a heart with a sentry, deciding what to let in and keep out.

prudence may be given to the simple, knowledge and discretion to the youth “ . While youth would represent inexperience, the simple refers to the open.

Openness is exposure as opposed to being guarded. It is like an unprotected fort. Indeed in Hebrew the concepts of enticement and being deceived are related to this term.⁸ The biblical concept is to be careful about what is let into the heart.(Proverbs 4:23). Acquire prudence, discernment, and wisdom. For millennia these things have been the hallmark of maturity. On some basis a mature person pursues some directions, but not others.

Recognizing that maturity is not attained through openness, but rather through care Christians urge thinking within certain boundaries⁹. While the whole of the area has not been fully explored there are reasons not to proceed out of this area for answers. Consider what has been put forth in this essay thus far. There is a God who is omniscient. We are limited and subject to misperception. God will judge and we are responsible to Him. In light of this Christians have held that the area where maturity is to be attained is not found in philosophies that deny these positions. There must a guard which would protect against the intrusion of such “naïve” positions.¹⁰

If these positions were allowed to intrude into the heart, then it would be like listening to Satan in the Garden of Eden. (Proverbs 1:22 – 33; Proverbs 14:18; Proverbs 1:10 -18) This concept of maturing within the revelation of God is thus not one of ignorance. It is the way to true maturity. It refuses to be enticed and deceived into an openness to every or some positions that are contrary to that which is contrary to insightful fundamentals. (Proverbs 1:7; Proverbs 8)

It is important that our children grasp this concept of the Garden. Truth is to be found in certain directions and not others. It is ok and reasonable not to explore some “roads to truth” that the world suggests, because those roads deny certain fundamentals (Deut. 12:30 -31). Going down these other roads can lead to confusion and deception, since they suggest our children not test them by God’s truth. At the same time they urge that our children measure the Christian way by their fundamentals. Children should be taught to measure things by the Word of God.

⁸ Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament ; Harris, Archer, Waltke Vol. II definition 1853. It is worthwhile to read the entire article; however a couple of quotations will serve to illustrate the simple (in verb and noun form). “The basic verb idea is ‘be open, spacious, wide, ‘and might relate to the immature or simple one who is open to all kinds of enticement, not having developed a discriminating judgment as to what is right or wrong.” *peti* generally describes the naïve (not deranged) in Prov who must be well taught, since an immature person believes anything (Prov 14:15). It well to note the

⁹ Even though some may advocate openness, it seems every position counsels some guidelines (boundaries) on our exploration if we would be mature. A little reflection will disclose that revelation (information from others) is part of the process of identifying these boundaries.

¹⁰ Some may say this is an arrogant position. It is not. Consider that if the Bible is true, it would say something different than unreality would counsel. While this would put statement in the Bible at odds with others, it is not the voice of arrogance, but truth. Truth need not at the end of the day admit the validity of that which opposes it.

As an enticement some may say, “Any religion could say this. You can’t therefore condemn people who refuse to become Christians.” This comment has two points. The first is about others having the same advice about staying in their garden. I would agree that many religions could and do make such statements. Just because a lie says the same thing the truth says does not invalidate the statement of truth. The second point about people declining to become Christians is in part dealt with in Paul’s letter to the Romans. An implication of Romans 1:20ff seems to be that the truth of God intrudes on the false systems that exist, but they for various reasons will resist that truth. For this God will properly hold them responsible. A further observation about the last statement is that it fails to understand the nature of the Christian message and implications of its charge. What I mean is that the second statement is arguing fairness/justice. The biblical position is that all have sinned (Romans 3:23) and deserve God’s condemnation¹¹. The Christian message is about the gift of God to deliver us from what we deserve. The Christian message is not about condemning people, but rather telling them how to avoid condemnation (John 3:16-21).

¹¹ This is actually an implication of God’s holiness and righteousness as explained earlier.