

THRU THE BIBLE EXPOSITION
Psalms: Living By Faith In God
XCVII. Handling Harmful Evil With Great Blessing
(Psalm 97:1-12)

Introduction: (To show the need . . .)

Many letters to area newspapers and some people we know claim that harmful evils in today's world tend to leave them feeling nervous and negative. The reasons for this challenge are widespread and very intense:

(1) Harmful evils infect the mainstream media: "New York Times columnist Paul Krugman" wrote, "'The war on inflation is over. We won, at very little cost' . . . (He) included a chart that appeared to show a precipitous drop in prices," but the "numbers were based on Consumer Price Index data *excluding* . . . 'food, energy, shelter and used cars'" where "prices are still rising in the only sectors that truly matter for everyday Americans . . . There are two explanations for the media's obfuscations" on inflation: "(T)he overwhelming majority of journalists are on the . . . left," backing the president's policies, and they have "contempt for struggling Americans . . . who, in more cases than not, have less than them on every measurable scale." ("Press paints false picture," Ibid., February 27, 2024, p. 6A)

(2) Harmful evils engulf the legal realm: "There was never . . . any question that the U. S. Supreme Court would rule in Trump's favor" to topple "Colorado Supreme Court's decision to remove . . . Trump from that state's presidential ballot," and the fact that its "ruling" was "unanimous" was "not . . . surprising" as "Trump has not been charged with, let alone convicted of, engaging in an insurrection." Yet, a "cadre of 'experts' filed" literally "dozens" of "briefs urging the U. S. Supreme Court to rule in favor of the Colorado court." Thus, "the true halls of power where people aren't subject to the democratic will – multimillion-dollar nonprofits, 'private' universities that benefit from taxpayer money, even courtrooms – are filled with 'experts' whose credentials are based not on knowledge, character, or a devotion to the truth, but on ideological commitment to lie in service of the political-institutional monopoly that Mr. Trump and his voters threaten." ("Experts in dishonesty," Ibid., March 6, 2024, p. 6A)

(3) Harmful evils mark the political realm: "In his 2020 victory speech, President Biden" promised, "'I pledge to be a president who seeks not to divide, but to unify . . .'" ("The president's projection," Ibid., March 9, 2024, p. 6A) Nevertheless, "Mr. Biden opened and closed his 2024 State of the Union address making it clear that, in his view, the United States' greatest enemies are . . . the 50% . . . of Americans who would dare vote for his opponent." (Ibid.)

(4) Harmful evils affect our finances: "The Wall Street Journal reported Feb. 7" that "'Americans feel sour . . . many say, because their long-term financial security feels fragile and vulnerable to wide-ranging social and political threats" as "(u)ninspiring leaders at home running a government widely seen as dysfunctional, have left people without hope" of "fixing" America's "problems.'" (Confronting economic reality," Ibid., February 26, 2024, p. 8A)

(5) Harmful evils afflict many believers in evangelicalism: "The IFB (Independent Fundamental Baptist) church movement revolves around men. These men can be quite demanding and controlling (generally speaking). Abuse and trauma are common – just ask former IFB church members." (Bruce Gerencser, "Bruce, What Happened to Emmanuel Baptist Church in Pontiac, Michigan?" August 11, 2022; brucegerencsder.net/2022/08/) [The author of this blog claims that he attended IFB Emmanuel Baptist Church and its Midwestern Baptist College in Pontiac, Michigan before pastoring evangelical churches for 25 years only to end up becoming a humanist and an atheist (Ibid.). However, a credible believer who attended that same Church and graduated from that same college five years before the author of this blog began to attend those same institutions claims that the statement in this quote is true.]

Need: So, we ask, "How does God want us to deal with harmful evils that tend to make us nervous and negative?"

- I. **Psalm 97:1-12 optimistically anticipates Christ's Kingdom when He comes to punish the wicked and reward the upright, and it teaches the world to prepare for His reign (Bible Know. Com., O. T., p. 864):**
 - A. Verse one declares that when the Lord reigns on the earth, its inhabitants will rejoice!
 - B. Psalm 97:2-5 then speaks figuratively of the "presence of the Lord's glory" when righteousness and justice are the basis of His reign, and He severely punishes the wicked so that the entire earth trembles at His judgment.
 - C. Primarily, God's judgment will involve His righteously punishing idolatry so that the worshipers of the Lord will rejoice and be glad in God's clear sovereignty over false gods and idolaters, Psalm 97:6-9.
- II. **However, Psalm 97:10-12 provides *EDIFYING INSTRUCTION* for *GOD'S PEOPLE* (as follows):**
 - A. Believers should love the Lord but also hate "evil" (KJV), and the word "evil" translates the Hebrew noun *ra'* that refers to what is "wrong in regard to God's original and ongoing intention and detrimental in terms of its effects on man," Psalm 97:10a (H. A. W., Theol. Wrdbk. of the O. T., 1980, vol. II, p. 854-855).

- B. If believers thus love the Lord but hate harmful evil (*ra*'), God promises them great blessing (as follows):
1. God will "deliver" (KJV), or better, "snatch away" (*nasal*, B. D. B., *A Heb. and Eng. Lex. of the O. T.*, p. 664-665) the upright from the harmful control (figurative use of "hand") of the wicked, Psalm 97:10c.
 2. The Lord will "preserve" (KJV; *Ibid.*, p. 1036-1037) the "souls" (KJV) – *nepesh* in Hebrew, referring to physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual life – of the godly. (Kittel, *Biblia Hebraica*, p. 1060; *Ibid.*, H. A. W., p. 587-591; Robert B. Girdlestone, *Synonyms of the O. T.*, 1973, p. 56-59), Psalm 97:10b.
 3. Finally, "light is sown" (KJV), from the Hebrew verb *zara*' (*Ibid.*, B. D. B., p. 281-282) for the righteous (Psalm 97:11a), and since the parallelism in verse 11 is synthetic where verse 11b explains the "light" in v. 11a, "light" here figuratively refers to gladness. God thus figuratively "sows" gladness for believers, so that in time, that gladness reaps the produce of multiplied degrees of gladness in one's experience!
- C. Verse 12 then calls the upright to rejoice in the Lord and to thank Him, recalling His holiness, His separation from harmful evil, for God rewards loving Him and hating harmful evil in holiness with expanding joy!

III. Significantly, Scripture shows that believers in our era can experience these blessings to some degree:

- A. We have often noted that Revelation 3:21 that pertains to our era of Church History in light of its figurative clarification in Revelation 7:17 implies that in our era of Church History, we face a "mini-Great Tribulation" where leaders full of intrigue in the government-economic-religious world complex afflict subordinates. The afflicted will seek balm from the afflictions and find it the exposition of Scripture in Bible teaching churches.
- B. However, Revelation 7:17 is itself an abbreviated reference to God's claims in Revelation 21:4-6 (as follows):
1. Revelation 7:17a predicts Christ's shepherding believers who come out of the future Great Tribulation Period unto the fountain of living waters, and Revelation 7:17b predicts that God will wipe away all tears.
 2. Revelation 7:17b thus reflects the theme of Revelation 21:4a on God's wiping away tears and Revelation 7:17a reflects the theme of Revelation 21:6b on God's provision of the fountain of the water of life.
 3. However, *between* Revelation 21:4a and Revelation 21:6b, at Revelation 21:5, God pledges to make all things new in creating a new universe that is untouched by the harmful effects of sin in the old universe!
 4. Thus, applying Psalm 97:10-12 in view of Revelation 3:21; 7:17 and 21:4-6, we learn that God will **shield** believers in **our era** from its "mini-Great Tribulation" trials if they practice the holiness of loving God and hating harmful evils in the world by God's giving them *relative* deliverance from control by the wicked, *relative* protection of physical, mental, emotional and spiritual harm, and a *relative* proliferation of joy!

Lesson: *If we believers today love the Lord but hate harmful evil in the world, regardless of the existence of our era's "mini-Great Tribulation" trials, God will grant us relative deliverance from the control of the wicked, preservation of our physical, mental, emotional and spiritual welfare, and a relative degree of proliferating joy.*

Application: *(1) May we trust in Christ Who died as our Atoning Sacrifice for sin that we might receive God's gift of eternal life, John 3:16; 1 Corinthians 15:1-11. (2) May we love God and hate harmful evil for blessing today.*

Conclusion: (To illustrate the message and provide additional guidance . . .)

We apply this sermon's lesson to the issues of concern in our introduction for our edification (as follows):

(1) On the biased pride of mainstream media journalists, May we love the Lord and hate all pride and bias and humbly relate to all people in God's love for them, cf. Romans 13:8.

(2) On the progressives who called for Mr. Trump to be punished as an insurrectionist though he has neither been charged with nor convicted of insurrection, may we love the Lord and presume everyone to be innocent until proven guilty, Deuteronomy 19:15. [Deuteronomy 19:16-21 even calls for those making false charges to be punished with the same punishment that they themselves try to see leveled against the innocent party they oppose!]

(3) On the president's hypocritical disunifying State of the Union address, may we love the Lord and hate harmful hatred and love all men (Romans 13:8) even if we must separate from sinners (Ephesians 5:11-17).

(4) On concerns Americans have about their finances due to a dysfunctional government, may we love God but hate the dysfunctional acts of officials who create financial hardships for the people while being content with what we have and trust our financial welfare to God Who guards us from the evils others do, Hebrews 13:5-6.

(5) On pastors who are demanding, controlling and abusive to God's people, may we love the Lord but hate such harmful evils. May we church leaders rely on the Holy Spirit to use our spiritual gifts to preach and teach God's Word and lead by gracious example versus oppressing God's flock, 2 Timothy 1:6-7; 1 Timothy 4:14-16; 1 Peter 5:3.

May we trust in Christ Who died as our Atoning Sacrifice for sin that we might receive God's gift of eternal life. May we love God and hate harmful evil for great blessing.