

**December 28, 2025**  
**Psalm 26 – Gospel Judgment**  
**Pastor Dean VanEvery**

Good morning, merry Christmas, and Happy New year. Today we are continuing our series through the Psalms with Psalm 26. For anyone who might be visiting us this morning, we have been working our way through the Psalms one chapter at a time for the last few months. So, last week Pastor Michael preached Psalm 25, this week we're in Psalm 26, and next week we'll look at Psalm 27. Throughout this sermon series through the Psalms, I have been repeatedly surprised with how well the Psalm for the week has lined up with something going on in the world around us. Sometimes it lined up with events in the news, and sometimes it lined up with events in the regular calendar, like when Psalm 22 fell at the beginning of Advent.

To my mind, this Psalm here is an example of the second kind. This Psalm, to me, is a really helpful Psalm to be considering on the last Sunday of the year. Why?

This Psalm is an example for us of godly self-evaluation. This Psalm is a prayer where David lays out his life before the Lord and asks him to judge him, to evaluate him.

This time of year is consistently one of my favorite times of the year, because it seems to lend itself really well to exactly this kind of reflection and self-assessment.

Psalm 26 is a helpful Psalm for us to help us do a little bit of reflection and assessment. Now, David here is likely not thinking about his life in that general kind of a way. Most likely this is a Psalm written in response to a very specific situation.

Likely, this is yet another Psalm where David has been accused of something wicked, and he is asking God to deliver him. To vindicate him. We don't know what it is exactly, but based on some clues in the text, it's something bad. Verse 5 he's talking about the assembly of evildoers, and verses 9 and 10 he's talking about bloodshed and bribes. So, he's probably not sweating an unpaid parking ticket here.

One suggestion comes from 2 Samuel chapter 4, you can read the details there if you want, 2 Samuel 4. Basically, this was a time when one of David's political rivals, the last surviving son of King Saul, was assassinated. David, naturally enough, was eager to clear his name from any involvement in it.

So, we don't know for sure, that's just a guess, it could have been something that wasn't even recorded. So, we just don't know. But it's something like that. David has been accused, at the very least, accused in the court of public opinion, and he is praying here for God to vindicate him, to judge him, and make it clear to all that David is innocent.

Before turning to get into the text, and to apply it to ourselves a bit, a couple comments. First, at just the observational level, we need to note how common this is, this pattern of the righteous being falsely accused by their enemies. Think about Joseph and Potiphar's wife, or Stephen getting accused of speaking against the Temple, or Paul, getting accused of bringing a Greek into the Temple, or above it all, Jesus himself, getting accused of blasphemy.

If we read our Bible, we should not be surprised to find ungodly people today accusing godly people of evil things. Jesus himself said it would be common.

So, that raises two practical applications right off the bat. First, we need to have strong enough spines to not collapse when that happens to us. Notice what David does here. He doesn't go and grovel to the mobs to try to appease them, he prays. He entrusts himself to God. Or take Stephen, I love his example – he's the first known martyr for the cause of Christ.

He's hauled before the chief priests and accused of speaking against the temple because he's preaching Christ. So, what does he do? Does he apologize and promise to tone it down next time? No, he delivers a blistering sermon about the tendency of the Jewish leaders to kill the righteous, and then ends it saying, "You stiff-necked

people, uncircumcised in heart and ears, you always resist the Holy Spirit. As your fathers did, so do you. Which of the prophets did your fathers not persecute?”

And then, as they stoned him to death shortly thereafter, we read this, “As they were stoning Stephen he called out, ‘Lord Jesus, receive my spirit.’ And falling to his knees he cried out with a loud voice, ‘Lord, do not hold this sin against them.’” That’s a man with a backbone.

So, that’s the first application. Being a Christian and living consistently and with conviction might make some people a little irritated, and given the chance you might find yourself accused of evil things. Don’t let that scare you into a private, impractical Christianity.

But second, it should remind us of the importance of Biblical justice principles. The Bible tells us that no charge should be allowed without multiple witnesses,<sup>1</sup> and that people should be treated with impartiality.<sup>2</sup> So, we should be slow to jump to conclusions whenever we hear about some new scandalous accusation, even if it fits our preferred narrative.

Bringing this a little closer to home, the Bible’s warnings about false accusations should even shape how we settle disputes between our children. When one kid comes crying to you accusing the other of stealing a toy, or hitting them, we should remember the biblical requirement to not admit a charge without two witnesses, no matter how big the tears are. Our intuitions about who is lying and who is the victim are not as reliable as we think.

God actually knows how sinful human hearts work, and he has given us safeguards in his Word to help us do the best that we can with the limitations that we have.

Ok, that being said, I want to consider this Psalm as an example of godly self-assessment, or gospel, self-judgment. Basically, what David is doing here is asking for God to judge him, to search him, to assess him. And here he holds up several different aspects of his life as evidence that he is innocent of the crime he is accused of. What this does for us is it creates basically a high-level portrait of gospel godliness, that we can use to assess ourselves.

I think this is such a helpful passage for this because David here expertly avoids both common pitfalls, both common ditches when it comes to self-assessment. When we come to self-assessment, we often tend towards one of two extremes. We either make our assessment too subjective, or too exterior. We either make our assessment only about our thoughts and feelings on the one hand, or only about our actions on the other. We either make our assessment too sentimental, or too practical.

And this makes sense, we tend to assess the things that we tend to be the most interested in. Some of us are analyzers, we live in our thoughts and are pleased when we get something straight in our heads, whether or not it actually affects anything outside ourselves. Or some of us are feelers, we’re very attuned to our feelings and the feelings of others. And these two will probably tend to have a more sentimental assessment of their past year. And there’s nothing wrong with that, it’s just not the whole picture.

And on the other hand some of us tend to be more practical oriented. You don’t really care about the history or theory involved, you’re not too worried about how you feel about the project, you just want to do something that makes a visible difference in the world around you. Again, that’s great, but just not the whole picture.

The Christian life can’t be reduced to either thoughts, feelings, or actions, but neither can it ignore any of them. Head, heart, and hand must all be redeemed and brought under the Lordship of Jesus Christ. This is what’s so helpful about this Psalm as a guide. He so expertly brings all three into consideration.

His thoughts are involved, “I have trusted in the Lord.” His feelings are involved, “I hate the assembly of evildoers... I love the habitation of your house.” And his actions are involved, “I have walked in my integrity.”

This is why, I think “gospel godliness” is the best way to sum up what we see in this Psalm.

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<sup>1</sup> Deuteronomy 19:15, 1 Corinthians 13:1

<sup>2</sup> Leviticus 19:5, James 2:1

In other words, what we see here in this Psalm isn't just "gospel sentimentalism," or "gospel self-esteem," but neither is it "bootstrap godliness" or "self-righteous godliness." This is a picture of godly living that is serious about living uprightly according to the law of God, and resting in the love and redeeming grace of God.

In this Psalm David will give us three aspects of gospel godliness: Gospel integrity in verses 1 through 3, gospel companionship in verses 4 through 10, and gospel confidence in verses 11-12.

### 1-3, GOSPEL INTEGRITY

Ok, look at the first three verses. There are two things I want you to notice here, the first is something we've seen in a few Psalms already. Who is he appealing to? Who does he want to be judged by? God. The Lord. That first word there, "vindicate" is translated that way in most modern English translations, but it could be more literally translated simply as 'judge' me.

This is foundational for any true gospel godliness. Who is the judge that you care most about? Whose judgement, to you, trumps all else? This will ultimately determine the shape of your life. Whose approval are you anxious to win? Or to keep?

The road to compromise can often begin with small steps of simply caring too much about what the unbelieving world thinks of you.

Solomon succinctly sums up this idea in Proverbs 29:25 – **"the fear of man lays a snare, but whoever trusts in the Lord is safe."** In other words, caring too much about what other people think about you is like putting little bear traps all around your house. You're just setting yourself up to get snared later on.

How the world defines goodness and how God defines goodness are diverging more and more every year. How the world defines love and how God defines love are moving further apart. How the world defines wisdom, and freedom, and how God defines these things are moving further and further apart.

More and more, to pursue what is good, to love people, to pursue godly wisdom, and true freedom, will look to the world like wasting your life (especially if you make choices for your family over against career). It will look like being hateful, and pursuing foolishness and slavery.

Do you want to be seen as wise in the eyes of man? Or wise in the eyes of God?

So, I want to give you a few "diagnostic questions" to help you use this to assess yourself over this past year or so.

Here's the first: diagnostic question 1 – who is your judge? Who ultimately tells you what is good or bad? Who ultimately tells you what is cool or uncool? Who tells you what is good, and true, and beautiful? Who is your judge?

Next, notice how David links faith and integrity in these verses. Notice the rest of verse 1, **"I have walked in my integrity"** [there's integrity], **"and I have trusted in the LORD without wavering."** There's faith. Then skip down to verse 3, **"For your steadfast love is before my eyes,"** [faith], **"and I walk in your faithfulness."** Integrity.

The second question for gospel integrity is simply this – do you trust the Lord? Basically, David is saying that 'because I trust the Lord, I have not been willing to break his Law to make things work out in my favor.'

Think back to the example with the assassination of the political rival. God promised David that he would be the King of Israel, and yet, because David trusted God, David was not willing to break God's law – to murder – to bring that about. Or again, if you're familiar with David's story, there was a time when David was on the run from King Saul who was trying to kill David.

At one point David gets the drop on Saul, such that he easily could have ambushed him and killed him. And yet, he doesn't, because he refuses to attack his rightful king, and to take his life.

Because David trusted God, he refused to resort to sin to fulfil God's purposes.

What this looks like for us is that often our most challenging temptations reveal the areas of our lives where we don't trust God. We don't trust God to provide for us, so we cut corners at work. Or we don't trust God that his plan for us is good, so we indulge in discontentment.

Godly integrity flows out of godly contentment. Godly integrity says that I am content with God's good gifts in God's good timing obtained according to God's good law. Now, that's not passive waiting – godly integrity is perfectly free to pursue good things with zeal and ambition, just restrained by God's law.

So, go after the promotion – just don't lie or slander anyone to get it.

So, the second diagnostic question again, do you trust God? Is there an area in your life where you are regularly tempted to sin or compromise? If so, does that suggest ways that you might not be trusting God, or his timing, or his methods?

So, the first aspect of gospel godliness is gospel integrity – because I trust God, because my eyes are fixed on his steadfast love, because he is my judge, I am free to walk in integrity.

#### **4-10, GOSPEL COMPANIONSHIP**

Ok, so gospel integrity, then next, look at verses 4 through 10, gospel companionship. 'Companionship' is an odd word for this, I struggled to come up with a better word, so I went with companionship. I'll explain what I mean here by starting with the diagnostic question.

Question 3 – “how are the influences that you allow into your life [or companions] shaping your affections?”

So, there's kind of two parts there – first, *who* are the influences that you are surrounding yourself with? And second, *how* are they shaping your affections?

It's helpful to focus the question on your affections because that is both the most important component of moral formation, and also the most subtle.

It's the most important because your whole life flows out of your affections. What do you think is praiseworthy? What do you think is noble? What do you think is lovely? What do you think is cool? What do you think is cringy? What do you think is ugly and vile? These are your affections, and all your actions are downstream of these. Proverbs 4:23, **“Keep your heart with all vigilance, for from it flow the springs of life.”**

And it's the most subtle because our affections aren't shaped directly and combatively. Our affections aren't formed through propositional argumentation. Our affections are formed in much more complex ways, with layers of story and social influence.

So, the stories you listen to, and the stories you tell shape your affections. And the people you surround yourself with, the things that they value, that they celebrate, they shape your affections.

To be perfectly straight with you, the shows you watch, the movies you watch, the podcasts you listen to, the songs you listen to, these things are shaping you at the level of your affections.

And that can be good, bad, or neutral, but they are shaping you at the level of your affections.

And this goes so much deeper than swear words and skin. All of these shows are presenting you with a vision for the good life. These are good people, those are bad people. These are good and noble goals, those are silly goals. Be like this guy, don't be like that guy.

Now, that's not to say anything non-Christian is inherently a bad influence. From the beginning the church has recognized some value in the art and philosophy of the so-called virtuous pagans. So, you can watch a show today that's made and produced by nothing but secularists that celebrates courage, or sacrifice, or honesty, or whatever. You just need to be aware that everything that you are delighting in is shaping you in some way. Are you being thoughtful about your influences? About your 'companions'?

Proverbs 13:20 is relevant here, **“whoever walks with the wise becomes wise, but the companion of fools will suffer harm.”**

Ok, let's walk through the passage.

Verse 4, **“I do not sit with men of falsehood, nor do I consort with hypocrites.”**

Two things here, intimately related. What do your companions do with truth? There are men of falsehood – men who simply deny the truth. They flatly deny God and his Word. These are usually easier to spot. But then

second, there's the hypocrites. Now, a hypocrite is not just an imperfect person. We all fall short of our professed standard. James, the brother of Jesus, says that **"we all stumble in many ways."** Nobody's perfect, and we all miss the mark on how we're trying to live. That's not hypocrisy, that's just being imperfect. Hypocrisy is much more deliberate.

You can think of hypocrisy like trying to double dip. Hypocrisy is when you want the social benefits of professed godliness, but without the actual commitment to living by God's Word. This is the famous preacher who turns out to have been having an affair for a decade. That's hypocrisy. This is the Christian who lives one way in front of his church friends, and totally differently around his work buddies. That's hypocrisy. 'I want the benefits of godliness when it's convenient, and the comforts of worldliness when it's convenient.' That's hypocrisy.

Next, verse 5, **"I hate the assembly of evildoers, and I will not sit with the wicked."**

Notice here the centrality of his affections. He doesn't just politely disagree with what the evildoers are up to. He *hates* their assembly. There's a modern political correctness that makes this verse more difficult than it should be. Spurgeon has a helpful comment on this verse. He says,

A man who does not hate evil terribly, does not love good heartily. Men, as men, we must always love, for they are our neighbors, and therefore to be loved as ourselves; but evil doers, as such, are traitors to the Great King, and no loyal subject can love traitors. What God hates we must hate.<sup>3</sup>

Mature godliness is not indifference to evil and evildoers. Indifference to those who promote ungodliness is a sign of warped affections.

Verse 6, **"I wash my hands in innocence and go around your altar, O Lord,"**

Here he turns from negative to positive. I don't hang out with evildoers, but where do I hang out? Around your altar. Two things you need to note here. First, what the altar is, and second what it says about companionship.

First, what is the altar? In the Old Covenant God gave his people a series of sacrifices and sacrificial rituals designed to teach us our need for blood atonement. The wage of sin is death, so someone has to die to justify us before God. In the Old Covenant the sacrifices were animals, so they were just pointers. Sheep blood doesn't atone for human sin. These sacrifices pointed to and were fulfilled in Jesus Christ.

So, this altar is the central pointer to Jesus Christ in normal Old Covenant life. The central pointer to God's steadfast love and mercy.

Then second, what does this say about companionship. Implicit here is a commitment to a people, but specifically to a people committed to the gospel, to the good news of peace with God through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

To David, he's not going to make hypocrites and the wicked his companions, but he's going to be a companion with whoever happens to be there at the altar. If that's a lot of people, or not very many, doesn't matter, that's where David is going to be. He is going to live his life at the foot of the cross. Whoever is there will be his companion.

Verse 7, **"proclaiming thanksgiving aloud, and telling all your wondrous deeds."**

This companionship, this gospel companionship, to David, is expressed in thankfulness and worship.

This is a helpful test for us. When we think about our influences (and also the way we influence others), do our influences cultivate thankfulness and worship? Or something else? And again, this should apply to whatever non-Christian influences you have in your life. Maybe you like some economics podcast that isn't explicitly Christian. Does it (on balance, on the whole) cultivate gratitude and worship? Or entitlement, resentment or greed?

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<sup>3</sup> Spurgeon, "Psalm 26," in *Treasury of David*, Vol. I., p. 417.

Maybe you follow some lifestyle Instagram account. Does it cultivate contentment and godly excellence? Or does it cultivate jealousy and grumbling?

Gospel companionship is serious about pointing you towards what is good and true and beautiful, but true *gospel* companionship is rooted in the cross of Jesus Christ, and cultivates a posture of gratitude, contentment, joy, and worship.

There are things in the world worth getting upset about, and there are things in the world that should be mourned, but despair, cynicism, and gloom are not Christian virtues.

Then verses 8-10, **“<sup>8</sup>O Lord, I love the habitation of your house and the place where your glory dwells. <sup>9</sup>Do not sweep my soul away with sinners, nor my life with bloodthirsty men, <sup>10</sup>in whose hands are evil devices, and whose right hands are full of bribes.”**

Here David circles back to his appeal. I don’t run with guys that despise your law and mock your gospel. I don’t run with murderers and schemers, so don’t let me be punished like one of them.

So that’s the second aspect of gospel godliness, gospel companionship. Here are two reflection questions from this idea. First, just what I said earlier, “how are your ‘companions’ shaping your affections?” But then second, you could turn it the other way, “how are you shaping the affections of those that you influence?” Are you a source of gratitude and contentment? Or cynicism, entitlement, and bitterness? Do you cultivate reverence for God, God’s Word, and God’s people in those around you? How are you being influenced, and what kind of influence are you?

Ok, gospel integrity, gospel companionship, then last, verses 11 and 12, gospel confidence.

## **11-12, GOSPEL CONFIDENCE**

Now, these last two verses function more or less as a summary of everything that’s come before, there’s not really much in the way of new ideas to add here. Just note that the first 10 verses leading up to this point lived in the past and present tense. Verse 1 was in past tense – past perfect if you want to get fancy – basically stating what is true about David’s past. Then the rest, 2 through 10, is present tense, what’s true of David now. Here, then, in verses 11 and twelve he addresses the future. He declares what will be true of him – he will walk in integrity, he will bless the Lord.

We see some familiar concepts here – we see gospel integrity, and we see gospel companionship – the great assembly there at the end. So, the last aspect of gospel godliness that I want to draw your attention to is *gospel confidence*.

Basically, I want you to notice the way that David thinks about his own walk with the Lord, his own practical godliness.

There are two basic ditches that we need to avoid when it comes to evaluating our own practical godliness. The one we could call a simplistic overconfidence, where we, in one form or another, lower the bar of godliness such that we don’t see any real struggles or shortcomings in ourselves at all.

Maybe we wouldn’t say it out loud this way, but functionally God’s grace is something that we think we *used* to need, but now have moved past grace, or maybe that God’s grace is something meant for someone else, who isn’t quite as put together as you are.

But then, the other side is despair. Here, when you think about your walk with God, all you ever see is your shortcomings. Hopefully you expect God to give you grace for your sins, but you don’t really expect him to give you victory over your sins.

So, on the one side there's simplistic overconfidence, and on the other there's despair. Then in the middle there's gospel confidence. Verse 11 really expresses this perfectly, **"<sup>11</sup>But as for me, I shall walk in my integrity; redeem me, and be gracious to me."**

Note the two halves there – there's godly confidence, "I shall walk in my integrity," but also gospel honesty and humility – "redeem me, and be gracious to me." David here is very clearly avoiding both ditches. He's not given over to simplistic overconfidence, he knows he needs redeeming grace, now and in the future. And he's also not given over to despair, he fully expects to walk in godliness and uprightness.

So, you could say, as David looks ahead to the new year, what is he expecting? Well, he's expecting to walk uprightly, and yet still need God's redeeming grace. So Christian, the same goes for you. When you look ahead to the new year, what do you anticipate? Do you anticipate needing God's redeeming grace? You should. Do you anticipate victory over sin and growing in practical godliness? You should.

Then verse 12, **"<sup>12</sup>My foot stands on level ground; in the great assembly I will bless the Lord."** The level ground is gospel confidence. Because of God's grace you are free to stand back up and keep moving.<sup>4</sup>

So, here are two more diagnostic questions for you as you prepare for the new year. 'As you look back on this past year where do you see your need for God's redeeming grace?' Then, 'as you look ahead to the new year, what sin or pattern of sin do you hope to see God help you put to death?'

Ok, quick review.

Three aspects of gospel godliness.

First, gospel *integrity*. Diagnostic questions – who is your judge, or, whose judgment do you care about the most? And, do you trust the Lord? Can you wait for his good gifts according to his good timing and his good means? Or do you feel the need to go outside his law to accomplish your own ends?

Second, gospel *companionship*. Diagnostic questions – how are your influences shaping your affections? And how are you influencing those around you?

Third, gospel *confidence*. Diagnostic questions – as you look back on the past year, where do you see your need for redeeming grace? And, as you look ahead in what ways do you hope to walk in greater godliness?

## **LORD'S SUPPER and CONCLUSION**

Today we're going to be celebrating the Lord's Supper, where we commemorate the broken body and shed blood of Jesus Christ to give us peace with God. This is the very core of gospel godliness. All our hope for vindication, all our hope for redeeming grace, all our hope for spiritual power to walk in godliness flows from this. Without Christ's redeeming death on the cross, God being our judge is only dread. Without the cross there is no redeeming grace, only condemning justice. Without the broken body and shed blood, there is no power to overcome sin. This is why, for David, the altar sits right in the middle of this Psalm. All true gospel godliness is only possible because of the great and final altar – the cross.

David was falsely accused. He was betrayed, he was slandered. Apparently, the Lord delivered him from it all. The false accusations came to nothing for David. But a thousand years later, the great Son of David, Jesus Christ, was also falsely accused. He was mocked, he was beaten, and in the end, he was hung on a cross in our place. And yet, even through death, God delivered him by raising him from the dead.

The one innocent was condemned so that the many guilty can be justified.

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<sup>4</sup> Proverbs 24:16, **"the righteous falls seven times and rises again."**

This is gospel godliness. You have been set free from both the penalty and the power of your sin. If you are in Christ, the old man has been crucified with Christ, and in his resurrection you have been given power to walk in integrity.

In a moment I will pray, and the servers will come forward, then we will take this meal, to celebrate, and remember the one who was accused on our behalf, who died that we might live, and lives that we might reign with him in life.