

# The Doctrine of Interaction

## Lesson Five

*The Issue:* The power of quantification is very great. When one says that something is big, strong (or too strong), then that exerts influence on the mind and on behavior. All of us live in a world of perceived risks. Dealing with those risks consumes a large part of life. But how we deal with them falls under the province of faith and trust in the Lord.

David, in Psalm 25, teaches us that quantification has to be replaced with something else. The propensity to measure and quantify the stuff of our situational lives is to be displaced in favor of what we are calling primacy. In other words, PRIMACY OF THE ETERNAL IS GREATER THAN THE REPORT OF ALL OF OUR MEASURING AND QUANTIFYING!

*Underlying Assumptions as Expressed in Everyday Terms:*

- 1) We can end up being “losers” if we neglect the powerful effects that material things can have on our present and future.
- 2) We must remember in the midst of our religious lives that God also made the natural world around us.
- 3) No one is going to discount God’s presence and His interest in our affairs; but let us temper that fact with the awareness that rocks are hard, and you have to pay the electric bill to get the electricity, and the grass in the front yard doesn’t just cut itself. We have to quantify and then do something.

*Generalization:* (A continuation of the previous) The eternal has primacy over the material and the natural.

*The Scripture Passage:* Psalm 25:1 – 3

*The Lesson:*

- 1) David makes an appeal in this passage. It comes in the form of a prayer: “Do not let me be put to shame, nor let my enemies triumph over me.”
- 2) The opposite of shame would be vindication. David understands that the difference between shame and vindication is purely going to depend upon one thing and one thing only. That thing is THE ACTIVE PRIMACY OF GOD!
- 3) If God does not have primacy over the material or if He does have it but chooses not to use it then David is lost. David is on the spot!

4) The writer of the Psalm believes that everything depends upon the primacy of the eternal. The active primacy of God will determine what is going to happen and therefore the quantifiers will not:

- the “bigness” of the situation
- the “strength” of the situation
- the relevant numbers and ratios of the situation
- the “virulence” of the case
- the “toxicity” of the circumstance
- the statistical qualities of the situation

None of these qualifiers will determine anything! Do we believe this?!

5) At some time in his life, David has been able to make a shift in his natural human thinking. He has the conviction that nothing depends on the material.

6) David chooses to interact with matter and energy by his faith. That is the conviction that...

*...everything depends upon the primacy of the eternal;*

*and, conversely,*

*nothing depends upon the material.*

7) David documents his conviction by saying: “No one whose hope is in you will ever be put to shame” (verse 2). So that tells us that his faith in the Lord has actively removed primacy from the material, and placed it on the entirely invisible. This action would be the hallmark of true biblical faith. Another way to say this is that faith is taxonomic. That is to say, true faith creates classifications. One class of things is determinant (can affect outcomes and situations) and possesses primacy; while another class of things cannot do either, and has no primacy.

8) Now the question is: Can we or should we interact with the temporal order in just this way or not? If we say “no,” then why not? The only reason is because of our confidence is that, after all is said and done, matter and energy retain their primacy. (At least they retain primacy in our thinking!)

9) The primacy of the material and the visible is a disposition made by our faith in human experience. This means that events, situations, circumstances and states of being are manifest of a certain kind of asymmetry. We can call this a GENTILE ASYMMETRY, where the material is considered to be much larger and more powerful than the world of the spirit. This not balance; it is a lopsided situation of the mind in which the visible far outweighs the invisible factors of God.

10) Look at Matthew 6:25-34. Here we see that the pagans, or gentiles, “ran” after the material factors, and gave them primacy, in their lives. David, in Psalm 25, is convicted that this kind of asymmetry will lead to “shame.”

11) The reason that this is so wrong is that such minds do not believe that God holds primacy over the world. In verse 3 David writes: “But they will be put to shame who are treacherous without excuse.” So, why do they act this way? Because they have no fear and no belief and no trust that the Eternal has primacy over what can be seen. Penalties that are unseen are not factors in their thinking.

12) If one believes that way, then one is free to do whatever one wants to do. We are free to think anything that we want to think. Consider the implications for such contemporary issues as stem cell research, reproductive issues and the place of homosexuality in our society.

13) David sees a REVEALED ASYMMETRY. Here, as in the gentile asymmetry, there is not a balance. Here the eternal far exceeds the reach of the temporal. We say this is a revealed asymmetry because it is not natural to our thinking; we only come to the conclusion that such an asymmetry exists because God shows us that it exists. The faithless do not fathom this truth.

14) This primacy that David holds to be true is complete. The eternal has complete primacy over at least the following four things:

- it holds complete primacy over discourse (the way we talk)
- it holds complete primacy over thought
- it holds complete primacy over our behavior
- it holds complete primacy over the temporal world of energy and matter

15) Such eternal primacy is comprehended by David to be factual. If it is a fact of the universe, then that pushes the realm of fact back in order to include something beyond the five senses. This is of course the unseen reality of God. J. S. Mill, Thomas Hobbes and a host of other worldly thinkers believed that only that which showed up on our 5 senses could be considered factual. The word of God does not agree with such an analysis.

16) For David the word “fact” overlaid the spiritual world and the physical. So his discourse did not exclude the spiritual from consideration as fact. There is therefore a right use of language. That right use could be called INCORPORATIVE. David uses language that incorporates the invisible and visible into the realm of existence and fact.

17) If this be true, then it must be the case that FAITH has primacy over our experience!

*Questions for Discussion*

- 1) How does David's prayer that he not be put to shame nor that his enemies be able to triumph over him show that he depended upon the primacy of the spiritual?
- 2) What makes it difficult for human beings to agree that "*everything depends upon the primacy of the eternal; and, conversely, nothing depends upon the material*"? List statements throughout Psalm 25 that indicate that David believed this and was willing to act on it.
- 3) What do you see in Scripture that would help you answer objections that there has to be a balance between the influences of the eternal and the temporal? Think of the most outstanding examples of faithfulness in the Bible. Would the people you're thinking of, have advocated balance or asymmetry?
- 4) List examples of the Gentile asymmetry in the entire chapter of Matthew 6.
- 5) Why is it necessary that the proper asymmetry be revealed? What do you see in Matthew 6 that "reveals" an asymmetry pleasing to God?
- 6) What steps can you take this week to make sure that your view of challenging situation or situations in your life is an incorporative view? Using incorporative language, write down some statements about such a situation. How will you assure that you use such language when thinking about and talking about your situation(s)?