

Psalms 73:13

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

Verily I have cleansed my heart in vain, and washed my hands in innocency.

Analysis

The psalmist's despairing conclusion: 'Verily I have cleansed my heart in vain; and washed my hands in innocency for nought.' If righteousness brings no advantage and wickedness no disadvantage, why pursue holiness? This represents the crisis point before resolution. The temptation is abandoning righteousness when it doesn't pay immediate dividends. Yet verse 17 will reverse this conclusion when eternal perspective is gained. Righteousness is never 'in vain' (1 Corinthians 15:58).

Historical Context

This despair echoes Malachi 3:14—'It is vain to serve God.' Israel questioned whether covenant faithfulness mattered if obedience brought suffering and disobedience brought prosperity. Only eternal judgment resolves this apparent injustice.

Related Passages

John 15:13 — Greatest form of love

1 John 4:8 — God is love

Study Questions

1. Have you ever felt that pursuing righteousness was 'in vain'—what restored proper perspective?
2. How does eternity reframe the value of present righteousness even when unrewarded temporally?
3. What sustains holiness when there's no immediate payoff and wickedness seems advantageous?

Interlinear Text

אֶרָא	כִּי יָקִים	אֶפְרָא	לִבִּי	וְאָרַח	בְּנִקְיָא	כַּפָּי:
H389	in vain	Verily I have cleansed	my heart	and washed	in innocence	my hands
	H7385	H2135	H3824	H7364	H5356	H3709

Additional Cross-References

Psalms 26:6 (Parallel theme): I will wash mine hands in innocency: so will I compass thine altar, O LORD:

Job 21:15 (Parallel theme): What is the Almighty, that we should serve him? and what profit should we have, if we pray unto him?

Job 34:9 (Parallel theme): For he hath said, It profiteth a man nothing that he should delight himself with God.

Job 35:3 (Parallel theme): For thou saidst, What advantage will it be unto thee? and, What profit shall I have, if I be cleansed from my sin?

Psalms 51:10 (Parallel theme): Create in me a clean heart, O God; and renew a right spirit within me.

James 4:8 (Parallel theme): Draw nigh to God, and he will draw nigh to you. Cleanse your hands, ye sinners; and purify your hearts, ye double minded.

Malachi 3:14 (Parallel theme): Ye have said, It is vain to serve God: and what profit is it that we have kept his ordinance, and that we have walked mournfully before the LORD of hosts?

