

Psalm 119 (verses 1-16)

ALEPH

The Lord's judgments are righteous

Psalm 119: Well known as the longest chapter in the Bible, this psalm is one of the acrostics. However, unlike the other acrostics, which contain only one verse for each of the 22 Hebrew letters, Psalm 119 includes eight verses for each letter, making a total of 176 verses! Thus, there are 22 stanzas, each containing eight verses beginning with the same Hebrew letter. As with most acrostics, there is no logical outline or flow of thought discernible, either within a stanza or from one stanza to another. The best way to study this type of psalm is by topics. There can hardly be any question as to the major topic of Psalm 119, however, since the Word of God is mentioned in all but three verses (verses 84, 121, 122)! The multifaceted character of God's Word is revealed by at least eight key synonyms for it in the psalm.

- (1) "Law" (Torah) is the most frequent of the words. It comes from a verb meaning "to teach", and thus came to be applied to a wide range of revelation, from an individual directive to the entire Pentateuch. It emphasizes that God has taught us in His Word what He requires of us.
- (2) "Testimonies" (edot), emphasizes the content of the Word as that which God has testified of Himself and His will.
- (3) "Precepts" (piqudim), refers to instructions from a superior regarding the duties of those under him, in this case, from God to man.
- (4) "Statutes" (huqim), is related to a verb meaning "to engrave" and thus implies permanent and unchangeable regulations.
- (5) "Commandments" (mitsvot), is a word assuming the authority of the commander and the inherent necessity of obeying the content of the charge.
- (6) "Judgments" (mispatim), or ordinances refers to decisions God has made as a judge in order to make earthly behavior conform to His heavenly standard.
- (7) "Word" (dabar), is an all-embracing term for God's revelation in any form.
- (8) "Word" (imra), might also be translated "promise", though the translation does not distinguish it from the preceding term to whose meaning it relates closely. It comes from the verb "to say" and assumes that the content of revelation is from the mouth of God.

Other terms that seem to speak of God's Word include "ways" (verses 3, 37), "Name" (verse 55), and "faithfulness" (verse 90). With these key words to express the substance of God's revelation, the psalmist explores the entire gamut of human response to the Word of God. Praise and thanksgiving for it, petitions that it may be kept, petitions that the psalmist may experience its comfort or conviction, confidence that its promises will be fulfilled, prayer for the ability to understand it, petitions that those who disregard it (the wicked), may be judged, and so on. Because of this exaltation of the Word of God, this psalmist has sometimes been accused of

worshiping the Word itself. However, his adoration of the Word always leads to its Author who inspired it. All believers should be accused of this kind of love for the Bible!

Verses 1-176: This longest of psalms and chapters in the Bible stands as the “Mt. Everest” of the Psalter. It joins Psalms 1 and 19 in exalting God’s Word. The author is unknown for certain although David, Daniel or Ezra have reasonably been suggested. The psalmist apparently wrote while under some sort or serious duress (compare verses 23, 42, 51, 61, 67, 71, 78, 86-87, 95, 110, 121, 134, 139, 143, 146, 153, 154, 157, 161, 169). This is an acrostic psalm (compare Psalms 9, 10, 25, 34, 37, 111, 112, 145), composed of 22 sections, each containing 8 lines. All 8 lines of the first section start with the first letter of the Hebrew alphabet; thus the psalm continues until all 22 letters have been used in order. The 8 different terms referring to Scripture occurring throughout the psalm are:

- (1) Law,
- (2) Testimonies,
- (3) Precepts,
- (4) Statutes,
- (5) Commandments,
- (6) Judgments,
- (7) Word, and
- (8) Ordinances.

From before sunrise to beyond sunset, the Word of God dominated the psalmist’s life, e.g.,

- (1) Before dawn (verse 147),
- (2) Daily (verse 97),
- (3) 7 Times daily (verse 164),
- (4) Nightly (verses 55; 148), and
- (5) At midnight (verse 62).

Other than the acrostic form, Psalm 119 does not have an outline. Rather, there are many frequently recurring themes which will be delineated in the notes.

Verses 1 – 176: This magnificent psalm, the longest chapter in the Bible, celebrates “the law of the LORD”, God’s special revelation and gracious direction for life.

1-8 This psalm may be considered as the statement of a believer's experience. As far as our views, desires, and affections agree with what is here expressed, they come from the influences of the Holy Spirit, and no further. The pardoning mercy of God in Christ, is the only source of a sinner's happiness. And those are most happy, who are preserved most free from the defilement of sin, who simply believe God's testimonies, and depend on his promises. If the heart be divided

between him and the world, it is evil. But the saints carefully avoid all sin; they are conscious of much evil that clogs them in the ways of God, but not of that wickedness which draws them out of those ways. The tempter would make men think they are at them out of those ways. The tempter would make men think they are at liberty to follow the word of God or not, as they please. But the desire and prayer of a good man agree with the will and command of God. If a man expects by obedience in one thing to purchase indulgence for disobedience in others, his hypocrisy will be detected; if he is not ashamed in this world, everlasting shame will be his portion. The psalmist coveted to learn the laws of God, to give God the glory. And believers see that if God forsakes them, the temper will be too hard for them.

Verses 1-2: "Blessed ... blessed": Similar to (Psalm 1:1-3). Elsewhere, the psalmist declares that Scripture is more valuable than money (verses 14, 72, 127, 162), and brings more pleasure than the sweetness of honey (verse 103; compare Prov. 13:13; 16:20; 19:16).

Psalm 119:1 "Blessed [are] the undefiled in the way, who walk in the law of the LORD."

ALEPH. The First Part.

God gracious revelation ("the law") shows the surest and safest way through life's twisted highways and byways.

"Walk": A habitual pattern of living.

We see in this verse, the hope of a man to be as this one who walked in the law of the LORD. We have discussed before that there is a state beyond being saved and knowing the LORD as Savior. There is a place in our growth, if we are truly to be the blessed of God, that we can do no less than to make Jesus Christ our Lord. To know Him as Lord means that we walk in His will. The law of the Lord is not grievous to those who love Him. Undefiled, in the Scripture above, means without blemish.

Psalm 119:2 "Blessed [are] they that keep his testimonies, [and that] seek him with the whole heart."

"The whole heart": Heart refers to intellect, volition, and emotion (compare verses 7, 10, 11, 32, 34, 36, 58, 69, 70, 80, 111, 112, 145, 161). Complete commitment or "whole heart" appears 6 times (verses 2, 10, 34, 58, 69, 145).

Testimonies means witness in the verse above. Jesus taught a beautiful Gospel of love, when He walked upon the earth as Savior of mankind. We have talked so much about God not wanting the mind of man. He wants our heart. The testimony of Jesus was that He destroyed sin and death for all who will believe. He broke the curse that had been brought on mankind in the garden of Eden. Men and women who trust in the Lord Jesus Christ are no longer sons of men, but sons of God.

Psalm 119:3 "They also do no iniquity: they walk in his ways."

Not that they are free from indwelling sin, nor from the acts of sin, nor that what they do are not sins. But they do not make a trade of sinning, it is not the course of their lives. Nor do they do iniquity with that ease and pleasure, without reluctance and remorse, as others do. Or rather as new creatures, as born again, they do not and cannot commit sin. For the new man is pure, spiritual, and holy; and nothing can come out of that, or be done by it, which is the contrary. This is a distinct from the old man, or corrupt nature, to which all the actions of sin are to be ascribed (see 1 John 3:9).

"They walk in his ways": In the ways of God and Christ, into which they are guided and directed, and where they are kept, and in which they find both pleasure and profit. Here end the descriptive characters of good and happy men.

This again, is speaking of walking in the salvation you have received from the Lord Jesus. Repent is a very misused word. It is good to be sorry for your past sins, but repent means that you will turn from that old way of life and walk a brand new life with Jesus. In the new life, He will not only be with you, but He will be in you.

Galatians 2:20 "I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me."

When we are baptized, we are buried with Christ and we rise to new life in Him. We must walk the path of this new life, and not go back into a sinful way of life again.

Psalm 119:4 "Thou hast commanded [us] to keep thy precepts diligently."

"Keep ...diligently": The psalmist passionately desired to obey God's Word (compare verses 4, 8, 30-32, 44, 45, 51, 55, 57, 59-61, 63, 67, 68, 74, 83, 87, 101, 102, 106, 110, 112, 129, 141, 157, 167, 168).

"Precepts" are oral or written declarations of what God expects. The original meaning carries the idea of "fixed, appointed, designated", suggesting that the people must submit to the established expectations of a sovereign God or suffer the consequences.

We are to carefully guard our salvation. It is the most prized possession we have. It leads to eternal life. We must not get careless about the things of God. Sin is separation from God.

Verses 5-6: "O": It is hard at times to distinguish where the psalmist's testimony ends and prayer begins (compare verses 29, 36, 58, 133).

Psalm 119:5 "O that my ways were directed to keep thy statutes!"

"Statutes" comes from a root word meaning "to hew, cut in, engrave, inscribe". Therefore, the word statute came to mean what is "ordained, decreed, prescribed, or enacted".

The way of the Lord is lit up with the Light of Jesus. It must not be an uncertain path. We must gird up our mind and do the will of God. To receive the blessings of God, we must be obedient children to the Father. We must keep our feet on the path that leads to Him.

Psalm 119:6 "Then shall I not be ashamed, when I have respect unto all thy commandments."

Of hope in God, of a profession of faith in him, and of a conversation agreeable to it before men. Nor of appearing before God in his house, worshipping him there. Nor at the throne of his grace. Nor at the day of judgment, and before Christ at his coming.

"When I have respect unto all thy commandments": Or "look" at them constantly, as the rule of walk and conversation. And to copy after, as a scholar looks at his copy to write after. And affectionately esteem all his precepts concerning all things to be right, and none of his commandments grievous. And practically, not in the theory only; but observing them in order to practice them, and diligently attending to them, and steadfastly continuing in them. Impartially regarding them, one as another; and especially as beholding them fulfilled perfectly in Christ, who is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone that believes.

Guilt and shame are the products of sin. Only those who have not kept their way are ashamed, when they face the Lord as Judge. When we keep His commandments, we will be eager to stand before Him and hear Him say well done.

Psalm 119:7 "I will praise thee with uprightness of heart, when I shall have learned thy righteous judgments."

"Praise thee": The Scriptures provoke singing, thanksgiving, rejoicing, and praise (compare verses 13, 14, 54, 62, 108, 151, 152, 160, 164, 171, 172, 175).

"Righteous": God's Word reflects the character of God, especially righteousness (compare verses 7, 62, 75, 106, 123, 138, 144, 160, 164, 172).

We cannot do the will of God, until we know what that will is. The way to learn His will, is to study His Word (Bible), for in it is the secret to life with Him. The only praise that can be pure is praise that originates in a heart stayed upon Him. Even our praise is sweeter when we have a clear conscience, and know that all is well with our soul.

Psalm 119:8 "I will keep thy statutes: O forsake me not utterly."

Thy commands; thy laws. This expresses the firm purpose of the psalmist. He meant to keep the law of God. He could confidently say that he would do it, yet coupled with the prayer which follows, that God would not forsake him.

"O forsake me not utterly": Hebrew, "To very much;" so as to leave me to myself. His confidence that he would keep the commandments of God was based on the prayer that God

would not leave him. There is no other ground of persuasion that we shall be able to keep the commandments of God than that which rests on the belief and the hope that He will not leave us.

To live the life that the Lord would have us to live, we must determine in our heart as this psalmist did to keep his statutes. This is a promise from the psalmist who would not be able to face the life without the Lord.

BETH

“Thy word have I hid in mine heart”

Verses 9-16: To original corruption all have added actual sin. The ruin of the young is either living by no rule at all, or choosing false rules: let them walk by Scripture rules. To doubt of our own wisdom and strength, and to depend upon God, proves the purpose of holiness is sincere. God's word is treasure worth laying up, and there is no laying it up safe but in our hearts, that we may oppose God's precepts to the dominion of sin, his promises to its allurements, and his threatening to its violence. Let this be our plea with Him to teach us his statutes, that, being partakers of his holiness, we may also partake of his blessedness. And those whose hearts are fed with the bread of life, should with their lips feed many. In the way of God's commandments there is the unsearchable riches of Christ. But we do not meditate on God's precepts to good purpose, unless our good thoughts produce good works. I will not only think of thy statutes, but do them with delight. And it will be well to try the sincerity of our obedience by tracing the spring of it; the reality of our love by cheerfulness in appointed duties.

Verses 9-11: Internalizing the Word is a believer's best weapon to defend against encroaching sin.

Psalm 119:9 "Wherewithal shall a young man cleanse his way? by taking heed [thereto] according to thy word."

BETH: The Second Part.

Young man": Or, any man. But he names the young man, because such are commonly void of wisdom and experience, heady and willful. And impatient of admonition, full of violent passions and strong lusts, and exposed to many and great temptations.

"Cleanse his way": Reform his life, or purge himself from all filthiness of flesh and spirit.

"By taking heed thereto according to thy word": By a diligent and circumspect watch over himself, and the examination and regulation of all his actions by the rules of thy word.

If there is one theme that goes through all of this chapter of Psalms, it is the Word. We must not only read the Word of God, but we must hide its teachings in our heart so that we might not sin against God. The only way to be totally clean, is to be washed in the blood of the Lamb and be totally clean. His blood does not just cover sin, but does away with it.

Psalm 119:10 "With my whole heart have I sought thee: O let me not wander from thy commandments."

(See notes at Psalm 119:2). The psalmist (in Psalm 119:2), speaks of the "blessedness of those who seek the Lord with the whole heart." In this verse, he says that this blessedness was his. He could affirm that he had thus sought God. He had such a consciousness that this was the aim and purpose of his life that he could say so without hesitation. Every man who claims to be a religious man ought to be able to say this. Alas, how few can do it!

"O let me not wander from thy commandments": Keep me in this steady purpose; this fixed design. This is the language of a heart where there is a consciousness of its weakness, and its liability to err, strong as may be its purpose to do right. Such an apprehension is one of the best means of security, for such an apprehension will lead a man to "pray," and while a man prays he is safe.

This Psalm sounds so much like David to me. He may have succumbed to the sin of the flesh at one time, but he was a man whose heart was pure before God. The desire of his heart was to please God at all times. Let me wander not from thy commandments, is so near to lead me not into temptation. The psalmist here, is aware of the weakness in his flesh. He knows that only with the Lord directing his every decision, can he not wander into temptation.

Psalm 119:11 "Thy word have I hid in mine heart, that I might not sin against thee."

Not only heard and read it, but received it into his affections. Mixed it with faith, laid it up in his mind and memory for future use. Preserved it in his heart as a choice treasure, where it might dwell richly, and be of service to him on many occasions. And particularly be of the following use:

"That I might not sin against thee": The word of God is a most powerful antidote against sin, when it has a place in the heart. Not only the precepts of it forbid sin, but the promises of it influence and engage to purity of heart and life, and to the perfecting of holiness in the fear of the Lord. And all the doctrines of grace in it effectually teach the saints to deny all sin and worldly lusts, and to live a holy life and conversation (see 2 Cor. 7:1).

I look around me today and sin is on every side. It seems that the world has gone mad. Even many professing Christians are involved in a sinful life style. The problem with all of these people, is that they do not even know right from wrong. They have not hidden the Word (Bible), away in their heart. They do not even know what sin is. The Bible is our road-map through life. Those who do not carefully read the map, get lost. Some are so sure they do not need help, that they do not see the need for the Bible. How wrong they are. The secret to life is in God's Holy Word (Bible). The determination of our hearts is to hide the Word of God so deeply in our heart that there will be no room for anything else. We will be so full of His Word that there will be no place for sinful desires. Sin originates in the heart. If the heart is full of God, you will not desire to sin.

Psalm 119:12 "Blessed [art] thou, O LORD: teach me thy statutes."

“Teach me”: The student/psalmist invites the Divine Author to be his instructor (compare 26, 33, 64, 66, 68, 108, 124, 135), with the result that the psalmist did not turn aside from the Word (verse 102).

This is the desire of all people, who have disciplined themselves to follow the Lord Jesus Christ. The disciples of old asked Jesus to teach them to pray. They also would get Jesus away from the world and ask Him to teach them what the parables He taught meant. Jesus sent all the believers a Teacher and guide. In the book of John, He promised to send the Comforter, who would guide and teach all of His Holy ways.

John 14:26 "But the Comforter, [which is] the Holy Ghost, whom the Father will send in my name, he shall teach you all things, and bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you."

Notice, (bring to remembrance). You must hear it, before it can be brought to remembrance. The Word of God (Bible), speaks truth to us.

Psalm 119:13 "With my lips have I declared all the judgments of thy mouth."

Not the judgments of his hand, what he executes on an ungodly world. Nor the intricate dispensations of his providence; those judgments of his now unsearchable, though before long will be manifest. These the psalmist could not declare. But the revelation of the will of God, what his mouth has uttered, doctrines and precepts of righteousness and truth. These, though David had them in his heart, he did not conceal them from men. But out of the abundant experience he had of them in his heart, his lips spoke of them, of their nature and excellency, and usefulness unto others. And whereas he desired to be instructed more and more in them, it was in order to teach them, and declare them to others. Even all of them, in the sincerest and impartial manner (see Acts 20:27).

This is a declaring by the psalmist, that the words coming from his lips are the teachings from the Lord's mouth. Judgements here, could also be spoken of as the true statements of the Lord. The judgements of the Lord are printed in red in most Bibles. It is a very good idea to concentrate on these Scriptures. They contain life.

Psalm 119:14 "I have rejoiced in the way of thy testimonies, as [much as] in all riches."

I do rejoice; I exult in this; I find my happiness there. The word expresses a high degree of joy.

"As much as in all riches": Hebrew, "as upon all wealth." As people rejoice who have great wealth. I find my happiness in religion, as if in the possession of real wealth (Prov. 10:22). "All riches" (compare verses 72, 127).

If the psalmist here is David, and I believe it is then, he had many of the material things of this earth that we call wealth. He is saying, that the Word of God is more valuable to him than all these material things. If you could keep only one of your worldly possessions and had to give all

the other things up, would the thing you chose be your Bible? If not, material things are a god to you.

Psalm 119:15 "I will meditate in thy precepts, and have respect unto thy ways."

“Mediate ... respect”: The psalmist reflected frequently on the Scriptures (compare 23, 27, 48, 78, 97, 99, 148).

This is a very strong statement of commitment. He is saying, when I am not reading your Word, I will be thinking on its teachings. This is a man stayed upon God. When making decisions, He will see if the answer he is about to give, lines up with the Word of God. If it does not, he will change his answer, until it does line up with the Word. To have your mind stayed upon God is a very healthy situation. Thy ways are above my ways, O Lord. Teach me thy ways. Make thy ways my ways.

Psalm 119:16 "I will delight myself in thy statutes: I will not forget thy word."

“I will delight” (compare verses 24, 35, 47, 70, 77, 92, 143, 174).

“I will not forget” (compare verses 93, 176).

Some men who had been in prison for many years, said the thing that kept them alive and with hope, was the Scriptures they could remember from their earlier teachings. Some of them even wrote every one they could remember in the sand of their prison floor. To know the Word of God and hide it away deep within yourself is one thing that no one can take away from you. It is pleasant to remember the teachings of the Lord. Nearly all true believers have many Scriptures they have memorized. In time of trouble, it gives you something to hang on to. If I had to summarize this lesson, I would say that the most urgent task in our life is to read the Word (Bible), and hide its teachings deep within our heart. Use it to help us through this life and quote it aloud to others who are searching for the truth. The two great powers in this world today, are the spoken and the written Word of God.

Psalm 119 (verses 1-16) Questions

1. What is a state beyond being saved, if we are growing in the Lord?
2. To know Him as Lord means that we walk in His _____.
3. What does undefiled in verse 1 mean?
4. What does testimonies mean in verse 2?
5. What was the Gospel that Jesus taught?

6. When you receive Jesus as your Savior and Lord, you are no longer sons of men, but _____ of _____.
7. God does not want our mind; He wants our _____.
8. What is verse 3 speaking of?
9. What does repent really mean?
10. What does the Christian's water baptism mean?
11. Thou hast commanded us to keep thy precepts _____.
12. What is the most prized possession that we have?
13. Sin is separation from _____.
14. What is the way of the Lord lit with?
15. _____ and _____ are the products of sin.
16. Who are ashamed, when they face the Lord as Judge?
17. What must we do, before we can do the will of God?
18. How can we learn the will of God?
19. What determination must we have, that is spoken of in verse 8?
20. What does the author believe to be the theme of this Psalm?
21. How is the only way to be totally clean?
22. David may have succumbed to the flesh, but his _____ was stayed upon God.
23. Why are some Christians living in sin?
24. What is the Word?
25. The _____ is our road-map through life.
26. What is the determination of the author about the Word of God?
27. What is the desire of all who have disciplined themselves to follow Jesus?
28. Who is our Teacher and Guide?
29. What is the statement "bring to remembrance" telling us?
30. What is the psalmist speaking with his lips in verse 13?

31. How can you separate the judgements of the Lord from the rest of the Bible?
32. What is more valuable to the psalmist than the material things of life?
33. Would you choose the Bible above all of your worldly possessions?
34. What does the word meditate tell us in verse 15?
35. What kept some of the prisoners going, when they were locked up for years?
36. What is one thing that can never be taken away from you?
37. What are the two great powers in the world today?