

Truth Talk Truth Talk

Psalm 119 – The Word for Life!

Becoming Obedient and Faithful

Stanza 2 – Verses 9-16

The central theme of Psalm 119 is the importance of the Word of God for shaping the thinking and ways of those who desire to be blessed by God. This message is set forth in twenty-two stanzas arranged as an alphabetic acrostic. Each stanza supports and develops the centrality of God's Word as the primary and foundational means of living a life that pleases God. The first stanza introduced this theme and drew attention to the priority of keeping God's Word personally and passionately in every venue of life. But, how is the reader to accomplish this daunting task? The psalmist has already informed him that such an endeavor will require divine enablement from God. In the second stanza, the psalmist continues to probe this question and reveals the divine means by which a person may cultivate a life that is clean and pleasing to the Lord. The question at hand is, "How can a man so shape his character that his resulting conduct is pure, right, and in line with God's expectations?" The eight verses comprising this section provide a three-fold answer. This worthy aspiration will require a heart attitude oriented to such a pursuit. This attitude must drive the seeker to the right source for direction in his pursuit. And, it will require the passionate and consistent investment of committed effort as one personally engages in this pursuit.

Before looking at the three sections that occupy the psalmist in this stanza, it will be helpful to dwell briefly on the overarching emphasis of these eight verses. That emphasis is articulated in the opening question, "How can a young man keep his way pure before Yahweh?" Clearly, this is a reference to personal sanctification and if, as has been suggested, Daniel is the psalmist, this question takes on very profound implications in a context much like ours. The psalmist's question is not prompted merely by theological or academic interests but rather by a deep desire to live acceptably before God in the crucible of daily life in the midst of a hostile and pagan culture. How will he face the daily temptations and pressures in such an environment and do so without sinning before God? The challenge is immense and personal and the stakes are huge. How to pursue a life that pleases God and meet the legitimate expectations of the surrounding culture without compromise or defilement is no small task. Any hope of success is tied immediately to a source of instruction by which his life may be guided and guarded from sin or error. That source is identified as the Word of Yahweh.

As the psalmist lives out the daily decisions and activities of life he does so according to or regulated by God's word. In other words, the emphasis goes beyond mere knowledge of Yahweh's Word for information's sake alone. Instead, the emphasis is most certainly on the concept of valuing, retaining, and abiding in the "ways" of Yahweh so that his ways are conformed to God's ways. And the "ways" of God are only known as they are revealed by the "Word" of God. Therefore, what is required is the diligent study in, devoted meditation upon, and delighted application of that Word.

God's Word is powerful to cleanse a life from sin morally, emotionally, physically, and relationally. This cleansing comes as one heeds what God has said about repentance, restitution, renewal, and forgiveness. But, all of this requires one's entire life effort. One may not advance by half-hearted attempts. Such pursuit demands devoting one's entire heart to this process because only a person wholly devoted to this will be concerned enough to learn God's Word to the point of intuitively apply it to every situation encountered along life's journey.

A person who has come to this level of commitment to pursue a pure life that pleases God will be marked by his deep valuing of God's Word. Yahweh's Word is priceless to such a person and valued as much as if not more so than vast wealth. Most of us if genuinely given the opportunity to procure vast wealth would exert all due diligence to obtain it. The psalmist is clearly stating this same ardent desire is present in him toward God's Word. It is that valuable to him. The reason is revealed in the logical progression of ideas set forth in the verses that follow. A life conformed to the ways of God is of inestimable worth. Such a life is only possible when shaped by the Word of God which accurately reveals the ways of God. And, since this is so, people who desire to live in consistent obedience to God in all things must constantly reflect and meditate upon God's Word so that they remember the instruction it reveals and this will only happen as they delight in the "will" of God as revealed in His laws or statutes.

So, in short, a person who desires to pursue a life that pleases God in the crucible of real world living must be a person whose ways are conformed to God's ways. This requires a personal, constant, and consistent commitment to knowing the ways of God and obeying the will of God as revealed by the Word of God.

The stress on personal sanctification and the means by which one may obtain it is developed by directing the reader to personally ponder the Word of God in order to discover and practice the will of God in all areas of life. This stanza reveals three key requirements essential to such pursuit. I am indebted to George Zamek's insightful comments in this section of his commentary, *The Word of God in the Child of God*.

First, the pursuit of personal sanctification will require the right attitude (vv. 9-11). This attitude will manifest itself in an awareness of my need to pursue sanctification in daily living as well as an acknowledgement that this endeavor will require a wholehearted sustained life energy on my part. Furthermore, the wholehearted pursuit is accompanied by the accrual or treasuring up of God's Word in my inner man in order to avoid sinful behavior, thought, or speech.

Second, the pursuit of personal sanctification must be directed to the right source (v. 12). In order to live obediently before God, I must know His expectations. If I am to direct my steps in ways that please Him, I must know the path He has set forth. Therefore it comes as no surprise that the source of personal sanctification is outside of myself. Left to my own strength and wisdom, I have no hope of success. However, God is the source to which the psalmist directs my pursuit. His strength and His direction are more than external guides for the journey, they are internal fountains of strength for the journey. This is so because of God's righteous character and because of His capability to instruct men by the binding and permanent force of the nature of His divine prescriptions (statutes) for life.

Third, the pursuit of personal sanctification will require a sustained effort (vv 13-16). This effort will be demonstrated in my verbal testimony regarding God's declarations (v. 13). In other words, my speech will be shaped and directed by God's speech. My effort will be demonstrated by the adoption of proper priorities in this life (v. 14). It will be reflected both by my diligent study (v. 15) and my unwavering resolution to remember and apply God's Word to every circumstance and situation in life.

And so to summarize, the first eight verses of this psalm ("Aleph" stanza) introduce the goal expected of every believer – living to please the Lord. The means God has provided for the reaching of this objective is revealed in the second eight verses ("Beth" stanza) – personal accrual and application of God's Word to all of life. In the next edition of Truth Talk we will take a closer look at each of the three sections of this stanza.