

Truth Talk Truth Talk

Psalm 119 – The Word for Life!

Becoming Obedient and Faithful

Stanza 2a – Verses 9-11

Welcome to another edition of “Truth Talk.” As we have seen in our study of Psalm 119, the central theme presented by the psalmist is the importance of the Word of God for shaping the thinking and ways of those who desire to be blessed by God. Each of the twenty-two stanzas 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 stressed the priority of keeping God’s Word personally and passionately in every venue of life. In the second stanza, the psalmist revealed 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.

The psalmist wants us to note that success in this endeavor will only come about as we love, learn, and live out God’s ways to the point that our ways become like His ways. So, the real secret then is to discover where one can learn and understand God’s ways. It is important to remember that when we speak of God’s “ways” we are really referring to what God is like. In other words, we are speaking about God’s unchanging character. The term “ways” refers to the ethical outflow of one’s life and conduct, and this stems from one’s character. When we say we want to know God’s ways, we are really asking about His character. What is He really like? And the answer to this question has been given to us by God Himself in His Word. God’s Word is both the revelation and a reflection of His character. This means that if I am going to live a life pleasing to God then I am going to have to conform my ways (character) to His ways (character) as revealed in His Word. This will require that I come to this objective with a commitment to cultivate and maintain a right attitude in this process. That attitude will consistently manifest three important elements.

First, I must come with an attitude that demonstrates a spiritual awareness of my need (v. 9). I must acknowledge that I need to pursue personal holiness and sanctification precisely because I don’t have it and God demands and expects it of me! Furthermore, I must demonstrate my awareness that this purity will be cultivate, implemented, and preserved in me only as my life is shaped by, conformed to, and sustained in God’s Word. This is the short answer to the big question raised in this stanza, “how can a person keep his life pure?” Later in the psalm, the psalmist will give a more expanded and specific answer, but for now at the start of the journey, he reveals the primary answer to the age old dilemma of how to live purely in an impure world. That answer in short is to give constant and devoted attention to knowing and obeying God’s Word.

Not only must I be aware of the importance of God’s Word in my pursuit for personal purity, my attitude must also acknowledge a wholehearted desire to please God. And this acknowledgment must be a true reflection of my genuine desire. It is one thing to say I want to live in ways that please the Lord, it is another thing entirely for such living to be the actual genuine desire of my life. Only when this is so will I passionately pursue the conforming of my ways to God’s. It has been fashionable in some quarters to divorce the pursuit of knowing god from the study of His Word. The Psalmist gives

no ground to such irrational thinking. Here he specifically links the desire of his heart – a passionate full-orbed personal pursuit of God – with an intense dependency on God’s Word. Clearly the psalmist sees that the only way to truly know God is through the Word of God given by God as His Self-revelation.

However, this is far from an external self-dependent attempt to please God in one’s own strength. Apart from enablement through God’s grace, we are powerless to live out what we have discovered in God’s Word. This is expressed in the psalmist’s strong plea of desperate dependence on God, “Do not let me wander or stray from Your commandments” (v. 10).

The final element that must be present in the attitude I must cultivate in the pursuit of sanctification is a personal commitment to prioritize my life so that I orient and direct my strength and energy to knowing, understanding, and obeying God’s Word (v. 11). Assuming Daniel wrote these words, one can envision him surrounded by the trappings of wealth and power and exclaiming that He had chosen a different treasure. Rather than pursuing the wealth and wisdom of Babylon, he had treasured up God’s Word in his inner man. The word “heart” in this text refers to more than the emotional quotient of man. It involves his reason and mind. Daniel was expressing more than just an emotional feeling toward God’s Word, although that was certainly present in his heart. He was stressing that because he had come to see the abiding value of God’s Word, he had determined to store up its specific statements in his mind so that when his decisions were shaped by reasoned thought, these thoughts would themselves have been shaped and influenced by what he had stored up – God’s Word.

The reason this is so vital for all of God’s people lies in the nature of the human heart. Our unaided thinking has a natural propensity to lead us to actions that “miss” (sin) the mark God has set. The way to avoid “sinning” or “missing the mark” in our daily living is to so shape our thinking by God’s Word that when we make decisions, the actions that flow from those decisions are in accordance with what God has revealed about His ways and expectations in his Word.

The application of all of this to our life is simple. In order to please God we must strive to be like God. This requires that we know what God is like. This can only happen if we spend time in the Word where God has revealed what He is like. Any serious pursuit of this agenda that goes beyond mere lip service will involve an aggressive commitment to the regular and repeated reading of the Bible. Furthermore, this commitment goes beyond repeated reading to the pursuit of personal understanding. This means that any serious commitment to personal sanctification will require the diligent, careful, accurate study of Scripture. It also requires extended personal contemplation or meditation on what one has discovered in God’s Word. Verse eleven of this text sets forth the requirement of actually memorizing the words in God’s Word exactly so that they become intuitive responses that will help us avoid sinning.