

Truth Talk Truth Talk

Psalm 119 – The Word for Life!

Delighting in Divine Demands The Blessing of Obeying

*Blessed are the undefiled in the way, Who walk in the law of the LORD! ²
Blessed are those who keep His testimonies, Who seek Him with the whole
heart! ³ They also do no iniquity; They walk in His ways. ⁴ You have commanded
us To keep Your precepts diligently. (Psalm 119:1-4)*

For many editions of *Truth Talk* we have been studying the individual stanzas which make up this important psalm. The advantage of such a detailed, bite-sized study is that we get a thorough look at each part of the psalm. The disadvantage is that a protracted study of this nature might cause us to lose sight of the big picture of which each piece is a part. So in this edition of *Truth Talk* I thought it would be profitable to look at the ground we have covered from a particular perspective that will help us to recapture and retain the big picture presented by God in this portion of His Word.

We began by noting the writer used the structure and arrangement of this Psalm to alert us to its importance. Its alphabetic arrangement points to the author's intention that we grasp and retain this material. Now it is certainly true that all of God's Word is important and merits our careful study and attention. However, the structural arrangement of this material alerts us that these twenty-two stanzas are particularly important for our spiritual walk before God. To bring this into our world we might observe that the writer intends to give us the "A-B-C's" of something. Or we might observe that he is trying to take us from "A to Z" on a particular spiritual subject. But what exactly is this foundational and comprehensive material about? What is the subject to which all of this attention and focus is directed? The repeated terms for the Scripture which occur in every verse but two reveal that the subject of this psalm is the Word of God.

The opening verses of the psalm present a powerful observation – there are some men among all men who are uniquely blessed by God. These men all have lives that are distinctly marked by a blamelessness sourced in a personal, consistent commitment to live obediently under the authority of God as expressed in the commandments and expectations set forth in His Word. In verse four, the Psalmist reminds us that God has "ordained precepts" and He wants us to "keep them diligently."

Immediately after making the observation that out of all men are some who are particularly blessed by God and noting that their fortunate condition is tied to their committed obedience to His precepts, the Psalmist articulated his decision to number himself among these men by joining them on this path – the path of God's Word (v. 5).

In essence, the rest of the psalm is a call for the reader to join the Psalmist on this path and an explanation of what such a walk will entail. And, at the heart of what will be demanded of all who choose this path is a commitment to “keep” God’s precepts. So, if we desire to keep these precepts, I thought it would be helpful for us to spend this edition of *Truth Talk* examining what the Psalmist reveals about God’s precepts in order that we might delight in them internally and do them consistently.

I. The Importance of God’s Precepts

If we are to understand this dimension of the Psalmist’s message, we must understand that God’s precepts are of supreme importance. This is called to our attention by the Psalmist’s reminder that God has laid down precepts and has commanded us to obey them diligently (v. 4).

As we have seen earlier in our study, a “precept” is an order from a superior to a subordinate. In the military it would refer to the commands or orders of an officer to an enlisted man. Those orders would carry weight and authority because of their source. The higher the rank of the officer, the greater the weight and authority of the order. In this psalm, the “orders” come from the highest ranking Being in the Universe. There is no higher authority. Consequently, His orders must be given due consideration.

When we rightly consider these precepts and the authority they bear, we will respond by diligently obeying God’s instruction. The term diligently describes the manner of our obedience. We will obey thoroughly. Completely. Readily. Promptly. Properly and respectfully. And we will do so with a right heart toward the One who issued those instructions.

II. The Nature of God’s Precepts

But the Psalmist wants us to know more than just the importance of these precepts. He wants us to understand their nature. For if we understand what these precepts are like, we will give our diligent obedience more readily.

First, the Psalmist reminds us that God’s precepts are fully trustworthy. *Righteous are You, O LORD, And upright are Your judgments.*¹³⁸ *Your testimonies, which You have commanded, Are righteous and very faithful (vv. 137-138).* These “orders” and “instructions” were not designed to unduly restrict us from what is good or to harm us in some way. Instead, they were designed for our benefit and are fully trustworthy. Because they are sourced in the righteousness of God, they are good and upright instructions and they lead to good and beneficial ends and consequences for those who obey them diligently.

Second, these precepts are thoroughly tested. *Your word is very pure; Therefore Your servant loves it (v. 140).* The image intended by the idea of “pure” is that of something that has been thoroughly tested and approved. These orders are not “educated guesses. They were given by One who is omniscient and therefore they are trustworthy because they are thoroughly reliable. And their reliability is displayed in the lives of many of the Bible characters with which the reader would be familiar. For example, we see the reliability of God’s precepts as we note God’s providential working and blessing in the life of those who obeyed them in examples like Abraham, Joseph, and Moses. We also see their reliability and

trustworthiness when we observe the disastrous and tragic consequences of disregarding them as illustrated in the lives of Cain, Lot, and Achan.

Finally, these precepts are timelessly true. *The entirety of Your word is truth, And every one of Your righteous judgments endures forever (v. 160).* All of God's Word is true and reliable and His decisions and precepts are timelessly true. This does not mean that we are to therefore go back to the sacrificial system in the Old Testament. It does mean that the same God is on the throne in our day and His Word, rightly interpreted, is as accurate and relevant for us as it was for the Psalmist. So, how are we then to live? How are we to respond to these righteous precepts that are fully trustworthy, thoroughly tested, and timelessly true?

III. The Responses to God's Precepts

There are only two basic responses that a man can have to these precepts. He can believe them and obey or he can lean to his own understanding and choose to disregard them.

As obvious as it might seem, God has even chosen to address which of these two options He requires of those who are in a committed relationship with Him. God requires complete and thorough obedience (v. 4) that is continual and steadfast in its expression (v. 5). In other words, we are to obey God's instructions in all things, in all ways, and at all times.

The Scriptures also acknowledge that man has another option. He can choose to obey diligently and prosper (Joshua 1:8; Psalm 1:1-3, 6) or he can choose to disregard and fail. The Psalmist warned against the latter with this strong warning: *You reject all those who stray from Your statutes, For their deceit is falsehood (v. 118).* However, he also points out the multiple benefits of diligent obedience.

IV. The Benefits of Obeying God's Precepts

The Word of God offers protection from sin (v. 11) as well as purification from the effects of sin (v. 9). By obeying these precepts diligently a man can break the domination of sin in his life (v. 133). Diligent pursuit of God's demands is the way to remove the shame past sin has brought upon a man (vv. 22, 39). These divine instructions provide wisdom and direction for life and service (vv. 24, 66, 130). They provide strength and sustenance during the trials and difficulties of life (v. 28). They are a source of comfort in suffering (vv. 49-52). They provide refuge and shelter from spiritual danger (v. 114). They result in true joy and enduring happiness (vv. 97-103, 111-112).

In short, these precepts will furnish the man of God with everything he needs for life, godliness, and Christian service. No wonder the Psalmist cried out, *Let my cry come before You, O LORD; Give me understanding according to Your word.*¹⁷⁰ *Let my supplication come before You; Deliver me according to Your word.*¹⁷¹ *My lips shall utter praise, For You teach me Your statutes.*¹⁷² *My tongue shall speak of Your word, For all Your commandments are righteousness.*¹⁷³ *Let Your hand become my help, For I have chosen Your precepts.*¹⁷⁴ *I long for Your salvation, O LORD, And Your law is my delight.*¹⁷⁵ *Let my soul live, and it shall praise You; And let Your judgments help me.*¹⁷⁶ *I have gone astray like a lost sheep; Seek Your servant, For I do not forget Your commandments (vv. 169-176)!*