

LOVING THE BIBLE

I. INTRODUCTION TO PSALM 119

A. Overview

1. In general

- a. Unclear if David or someone else wrote it
- b. Psalms is longest book, Ps 119 the longest chapter at 176 verses
- 1). Amusing story among many re. Ps 119
 - a). 17th century Bishop of Edinburgh
 - b). Condemned to death
 - c). Tradition allowed for a psalm to be sung before the execution
 - d). Expecting a pardon to arrive, he chose Ps 119
 - e). The pardon arrived before the singing was 2/3 done

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2. Thousands of pages have been written about it

- a. *Treasury of David*, Spurgeon, 349 pages
- b. Charles Bridges, Church of England, 481 pages
- c. Thomas Manton, Puritan, 1,677 pages

3. Structure

- a. Twenty-two stanzas, one for each letter of the Hebrew alphabet = an acrostic
- b. Each verse of a given stanza begins with the letter of the stanza associated with the stanza's alphabetic letter

4. More focused

- a. All 176 verses minus 2-4 refer to the Word in some way

b. Uses at least eight synonyms for the Word

- 1). Law - 25 times
- 2). Word - 24 times
- 3). Rulings/ordinances - 23 times
- 4). Commandments - 22 times
- 5). Decrees/statutes - 21 times
- 6). Precepts/charges - 21 times
- 7). Sayings/promise/word - 19 times

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- c. Helpful to understand that each of these synonyms refers to a different aspect of the Word

- 1). Word = everything God has said in the Bible
- 2). Decrees/statutes = binding rules and laws
- 3). Precepts = the rules necessary to resolve issues
- 4). Testimonies = God as the faithful witness to His people, promises of blessing if heeded, warnings of distress and judgement if not heeded

B. Theme

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Overall

- a. Praising God for giving us His Word
- b. The Bible is the only way to know God & learn how to praise Him

- c. The most thorough elaboration of Ps 1.1-2

"How blessed is the man [whose] ... delight is in the law of the LORD, And in His law he meditates day and night."

d. Ps 119 opens in a little more detail ...

1 How blessed are those whose way is blameless,
Who walk in the law of the LORD.

2 How blessed are those who observe His testimonies,
Who seek Him with all their heart.

- e. John Montgomery Boice ...

"The Bible tells us that the path to a happy life—the Bible's word for it is "blessedness"—is conforming to the law of God"

C. C.S. Lewis' reaction to Psalm 119 (From *Reflections on the Psalms*)

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- 1. Could understand how a believer could respect a law and try to obey it

But loving it seemed like loving the pliers a dentist was going to use to pull out your tooth

- 3. His partial answer was to realize that the law means all of God's written revelation

- a. Promises and warnings
 - b. Blessings and judgements
 - c. Basically learning to love it because it provides the balance of the believer's guidance, provisions and warnings
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4. This led him to realize he was looking at "the engaging moral order of the divine mind"
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"The Order of the Divine mind, embodied in the Divine Law, is beautiful. [Therefore] what should a man do but try to reproduce it, so far as possible, in his daily life? His "delight" is in those statutes (vs 16); to study them is like finding treasure (vs 14); they affect him like music, are his "songs" (vs 54); they taste like honey (vs 103); they are better than silver and gold (vs 72). As one's eyes are more and more opened, one sees more and more in them, and it excites wonder (vs 18). This is not priggery nor even scrupulosity; it is the language of a man ravished by a moral beauty. If we cannot at all share his experience, we shall be the losers."

II. REASONS TO LOVE THE BIBLE

[Ps 119.97-104]

A. vs 97 sets the theme

1. The psalmist's chief emphasis is on loving God's Law

B. He gives five reasons for LOVING God's Law

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Reason # 1: It gives true wisdom (vvs 98-100)

a. He names three groups that the Word has made him wiser than

1). Enemies

- a). They are skillful at manipulating truth and circumstances to their advantage (Lk 16.8)
- b). Jesus answered this short-term focus on selfishness (Matt 16.26)

... The Word hasn't made the psalmist wiser by intellect

... These people think they are smarter than God and His Word

... The Word has made the psalmist wiser by being aware the real value is in how to save his soul

2). Teachers and elders

- a). Teachers have knowledge, elders experience
- b). Spiritual wisdom comes from God's Word

... Goes beyond worldly knowledge and experience

... Worldly wisdom changes and can't be counted on (1 Cor 13.8)

... God's wisdom given in the Word is true eternally

2. Reason # 2: Holds the believer to the path of righteousness

- a. Word both holds him to the right path and steers him away from the wrong path

Ps 119.9 "How can a young man keep his way pure?

By keeping it according to Your word"

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Ps 119.101. "I have restrained my feet from every evil way,
That I may keep Your word"

- b. Note that the verses assert the ONLY way to stay on the path of righteousness is by studying and observing the advice and commands in God's Word
- 1). To know you are sinning you need to know God's Word
 - 2). To know how to escape judgement and how to avoid sinning you need to know God's Word empowered by the Spirit

3. Reason # 3: God is believer's teacher through the Word

- a. Ps 119.102: I
have not turned aside from Your ordinances,
For **You Yourself** have taught me

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- 1). Unusual for the Hebrew to have a preceding pronoun
- 2). Added for emphasis to show psalmist knew that God was his teacher

- b. How much more would we learn and apply if we kept that in mind as we read and meditate on the scripture ? We are being personally taught by God !!
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4. Reason # 4: The Word is sweeter than honeycomb

- a. Ps 119.103: "How sweet are Your words to my taste!
Yes, sweeter than honey to my mouth"

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- 1). David similarly wrote in Ps 19.10
"They are more desirable than gold, yes, than much fine gold;
Sweeter also than honey and the drippings of the honeycomb"

b. Why would somebody say that about God's Word ?

- 1). [analogy of golf advice working = "sweet"]
- 2). Psalmist's choice of Hebrew words indicate he is likely thinking
of the promises or sayings of God
- a). e,g, maybe Ps 23 > image of the Shepherd
- b). Ps 8.1a:
" O LORD, our Lord,
How majestic is Your name in all the earth"
- c). A favorite of mine and others, Ps 1.1-3
"1 How blessed is the man who does not walk in the counsel of
the wicked, Nor stand in the path of sinners,
Nor sit in the seat of scoffers!
2 But his delight is in the law of the LORD,
And in His law he meditates day and night.
3 He will be like a tree firmly planted by streams of water,
Which yields its fruit in its season
And its leaf does not wither;
And in whatever he does, he prospers. "

d). Others that should be sweet to read & meditate on

- ... John 3.16
... Rom 8.28
... Rev 22.20
"He who testifies to these things says, "Yes, I am
coming quickly." Amen. Come, Lord Jesus. "

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- ... Considering the world around us, why wouldn't
these verses be considered sweet promises to guide
us through and buoy us up as we live for the Lord

e). Finally, note the wide range of life's needs it addresses

- ... Advice and warnings on fruitful living to young and old alike
... For those in trials, encouragement, inspiration, direction
... For those facing death, a stunning way to live forever

5. Reason # 5: Hating every wrong path

a. God's Law is perfect, declares what is right and what is wrong

- 1). Unbelievers debate this constantly
- 2). Believers are privileged to having been given it clearly

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b. Ps 119.104: " From Your precepts I get understanding;
Therefore I hate every false way"

c. We live in an ugly, dangerous world

- 1). We are to learn to love the good, but also to hate evil
- 2). Lawyers begin by studying the law, graduate and then practice
the law from what they have learned
 - a). So believers should have the same diligent pursuit of the Word

d. God's Word provides definition and guidance

- 1). It gives a clear black and white picture of what pleases and displeases God, what the blessings and negative consequences can be in each case

2). Commentary writer Derek Kidner

"...attraction to the true and revulsion against the false are
acquired tastes,"

- 3). It encourages obeying out of love for God and what blessings He promises if we do them rather than obedience out of fear

"When the law realizes itself as love for God and man in men's hearts, it ceases to bear the aspect of a command. The force of authority and the active resistance or inertia of the subject disappear; the law becomes a principle, a motive, a joyous harmony of man's will with the will of God; and in becoming internal, it becomes universal and transcends all distinctions of race or class."

- Rees, T.. *The International Standard Bible Encyclopaedia*

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- 4). Following God's law gives us security
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C. How should I actually love God's Law, the Bible ?

1. WORK to know it > study, meditate, memorize it

a. STUDY how Christ taught and talked about the Word

- 1). What did He express ?
- 2). What did He emphasize ?
- 3). What did He say about it's place in the believer's life ?

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b. MEDITATE on what you read and study

- 1). [Meditation is] "an activity of holy thought, consciously performed in the presence of God, under the eye of God, by the help of God, as a means of communication with God. Its purpose is to clear one's mental and spiritual vision of God and let His truth make its full and proper impact on one's mind and heart." - J.I. Packer
- 2). To *haga* (meditate) was to devour the word, like a pride of lions circling and eating its prey. The idea is to move the word from outside of us to inside of us.
- Curtis Zachery, Pastor Church of the City Franklin TN

2. Obey what the Word teaches

a. Put it into practice

- 1). "The Bible, then, seems to say, "God is not a hard master to require belief, without affording grounds for believing; only follow your own sense of right, and you will gain from that very obedience to your Maker, which natural conscience enjoins, a conviction of the truth and power of that Redeemer whom a supernatural message has revealed; do but examine your thoughts and doings; do but attempt what you know to be God's will, and you will most assuredly be led on into all the truth..."

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Exell, J. S. (1909). *The Biblical Illustrator: The Psalms*

- b. Observe where the promises come true, and grow to appreciate their value as that appreciation grows with experience
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III. HOLY SPIRIT USES WORD TO TEACH THE SPIRITUAL WALK STANDARD

[Ps 119.33-40]

A. Overview

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1. This fifth stanza has nine prayers wherein the psalmist asks God to grow him
 - a. vs 33: "Teach me..." > He wanted God to teach him
 - b. vs 34: "Give me understanding..." > he wanted more than knowledge
 - c. vs 35: "Make me walk in the path..." > he wanted discipline
 - d. vs 36: "Incline my heart..." > he wanted God to nudge him in the right way
 - e. vs 37a: "Turn away my eyes..." > he wanted God to keep him from evil
 - f. vs 37b: "...revive me..." > he wanted to walk in God's ways
 - g. vs 38: "Establish Your Word..." > he wanted God's Word to be his standard
 - h. vs 39: "Turn away my reproach ..." > he wanted to avoid wrong actions
 - i. vs 40: "Revive me..." > he depended on God's righteous to answer these

B. Stages of God's training

1. Ps 119.33-34: Entering the school

a. The psalmist is direct about asking God to teach him God's statutes

- 1). If he does he will keep them to "the end" = without limit
- 2). He also says he will keep them with all his heart = without reservation

b. Note he says he lacks understanding the Word

- 1). Knowledge won't help him follow God's ways
- 2). Understanding is a foundation to knowing right and wrong

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Ps 119.34-37: Asking God for a well-rounded education

a. vs 34: **The mind** > "... give me understanding ..."

- 1). He is looking for practical understanding that he can apply to living according to God's ways

- 2). Paul urged this in Rom 12.1-2

3). Why is the mind important in the believer's walk ?

- a). Worship > knowing Who God is
- b). Faith > understanding God's promises & acting on them
- c). Spiritual growth > sanctification, knowing what's at work within
- d). Spiritual growth > understanding steps the Holy Spirit is teaching in gaining spiritual growth (e.g. fruits of the Spirit)
- e). Evangelism > must understand the gospel to explain it, dealing with objections
- f). Ministry > identifying gift(s) and putting them to work

b. vs 35: **The feet** > "...make me walk..."

1). Puritan Thomas Manton

"...[the psalmist], in the former verses, had begged for light, now for strength to walk according to this light."

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2). In which direction should we walk ?

- a). *naw·theeb* Heb for "path" = the trodden way, not a new direction
- b). Commentary writer Herbert Lockyer...

"an accustomed trail, plain with the track of all the pious pilgrim's feet of past times."

c). Jer 6.16a

" Thus says the LORD,

"Stand by the ways and see and ask for the ancient paths,
Where the good way is, and walk in it;
And you will find rest for your souls. ..."

3). Don't give in to new "ways" or innovations outside of the Word !

c. vs 36: **The heart** > "Incline my heart..."

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- 1). The psalmist knows his heart will want to head toward selfish gain
- 2). He is asking God to turn it back to giving His Word the high value it has in keeping him on the path

d. vs 37: **The eyes** > "Turn away my eyes"

- 1). Note he doesn't speak of what his eyes should be turned to
- 2). He instead is concerned that he will be looking at worthless things and is asking God to redirect his focus as God wishes

3. Ps 119.38: Encouragement in schooling

a. He reminds God of the promises of His Word to support him

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"Fulfill your promise to your servant, so that you may be feared" *NIV*
"Confirm to your servant your promise, that you may be feared" *ESV*

b. The Hebrew word used here indicates the psalmist refers to needing the entirety of God's Word to live by and needs His support in it

Matt 4.4

But He answered and said, "It is written, 'MAN SHALL NOT LIVE ON BREAD ALONE, BUT ON EVERY WORD THAT PROCEEDS OUT OF THE MOUTH OF GOD.' "

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4. Ps 119.39-40: Warning to not drop out of God's schooling

a. He fears reproach

- 1). Could be because he has sinned
- 2). Could be because others have scorned him for being in God's schooling

- b. The psalmist asks God to turn any reproach away because God's Word is good and beneficial to him

IV. **GOD USES TRIAL / AFFLICTION TO KEEP BELIEVER FOCUSED ON THE WORD**

A. Ps 119.65-68

- | | |
|----|---|
| 65 | You have dealt well with Your servant,
O LORD, according to Your word. |
| 66 | Teach me good discernment and knowledge,
For I believe in Your commandments. |
| 67 | Before I was afflicted I went astray,
But now I keep Your word. |
| 68 | You are good and do good;
Teach me Your statutes. |

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1. The psalmist had somehow departed following God's Word

- a. God sent him affliction to cause him to realize where he was wrong and pull him back to obedience
- b. The psalmist recognized this and praised God for the needed correction
 - 1). The psalmist also recognizes that God is good and does good
 - a). Therefore when God sends afflictions they have a good purpose

B. Ps 119.71-72

- | | |
|----|--|
| 71 | It is good for me that I was afflicted,
That I may learn Your statutes. |
| 72 | The law of Your mouth is better to me
Than thousands of gold and silver pieces. |

1. The psalmist concludes that God's purpose was to bring him back to dependence on His Word

V. GIVING THE SPIRIT FULL SWAY TO AVOID DISCIPLINING AFFLICTION

A. So how does the believer hold to following God's command, avoid discipline ?

1. Really understanding "death of self"

a. Scripture defining it

1). Matt 16.24

"If anyone wishes to come after Me, he must deny himself, and take up his cross and follow Me."

2). Gal 5.24 - Further elaboration in what taking up the cross means personally

"Now those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires"

b. Andrew Murray elaborates ...

1). "This is the true self-denial to which our Savior calls us, the acknowledgment that self has nothing good in it, except as an empty vessel which God must fill"

2). "The moment God finds the creature abased and empty, His glory and power flow in to exalt and to bless"

"The death to self is not your work, it is God's work"

c. This is the point the psalmist reached in Ps 119.67

1). And God was answering him through all of the Word's teaching

B. Again - how does the believer hold to God's commands & avoid discipline ?

1. WE can't ! - Note a critical mechanism the Holy Spirit shows us in His Word

a. Rom 8.7-8

"...because the mind set on the flesh is hostile toward God; for it does not subject itself to the law of God, for it is not even able to do so, and those who are in the flesh cannot please God"

b. Rom 8.13

"... by the Spirit you are putting to death the deeds of the body, you will live."

c. Bottom line - Any effort to partner with Spirit is still working from the flesh = tainted effort. Success comes only by giving Spirit full control

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2. God's Word has told us how to stay with the Word in joy

a. 100 % filling by the Spirit necessary for success

1). Eph 5.18

"And do not get drunk with wine, for that is dissipation, but be filled with the Spirit"

"filled"= Gk pleroo /play·ro·o/ > to be filled to the full > 100 % !

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2). Gal 5.16-17

"But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not carry out the desire of the flesh. For the flesh sets its desire against the Spirit... so that you may not do the things that you please"

a). When a Christian does yield to the Spirit's 100% filling & control... promise is that he "...will not..." > the double negative (Gk ou mē) is emphatic

"...carry out the desire of the flesh" > complete, fulfill
(Gk teleo /tel·eh·o)

b. Note that the psalmist has written how fully dependent he is on God's teaching, giving him understanding, and pulling him back into the Word

VI. CONCLUSION

A. Embrace the joy of letting the Holy Spirit hold you to God's Word

1. Loving the Bible because God directly gave all the tools and guidance necessary to follow and enjoy the fruits of the promises in His Word

a. Gal 5.22-23 "But the fruit of the Spirit is ... "

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It is not a dictator's means of control unless you buck against it
It is THE guide to what pleases and displeases our Creator and Redeemer,
and thereby avoid corrective discipline and reap the joys of being effective for Him

B. Why love the Bible ?

1. It tells us about God and His character
2. It tells us how we need redemption through Christ's sacrifice
3. It gives us the commands and precepts that guarantee a happy and fruitful relationship with God

4. It tells us God has provided both salvation and the Holy Spirit to assure that we live it out, both here and eternally