

# **A Tribute to Jehovah's Word— Comments on Selected Verses From Each Stanza of Psalms 119**

**Dub McClish**

## **Introduction**

As Joseph Bryant Rotherham tried to conclude his introduction to the 119<sup>th</sup> Psalm, he had considerable difficulty doing so. He wrote:

It was hoped to close this merely introductory "exposition" with the foregoing paragraph. But the psalm refuses to be hastily dismissed. By this time, it has cast over us a spell which is not easily broken.... How full the psalm is of passion; how many sidelights on character does it convey; how gem-like many of its single sentences have come to sparkle in our eyes, commending themselves as texts and mottoes, memorable words of warning and cheer; how charmingly its biographical contributions, profusely scattered through its stanzas, have opened up to us the engrossing incidents which probably bestudded a single good man's life; and especially how profound are the historical and theological problems to which it effectively introduces us (305).

Anyone who has done much study, or even reading, in this marvelous psalm can understand Rotherham's statement. None who love and revere the Word of God can fail to be fascinated by the psalm's incessant exaltation of the law of Jehovah. This portion of Scripture represents the ultimate exaltation of Scripture. I confess my feelings of inadequacy to exalt such a tribute to God's Law.

Because of the unrelenting theme of the entire psalm and the random nature of the statements of the psalmist, it defies any attempt at outlining or defining of analytical structure (see more below). Any divisions of the subject matter of the psalm as a whole must therefore be purely arbitrary. Accordingly, we have chosen to divide this remarkable piece of inspired literature as follows:

1. Introduction and Selections from Stanzas 1-6.
2. Selections from Stanzas 7-14.
3. Selections from Stanzas 15-22.

## **Theme**

Matthew Henry correctly wrote: "This is a psalm by itself, like none of the rest" (685). Each of the psalms is unique, but the 119<sup>th</sup> possesses numerous features that set it far apart from the others. Its absolute singularity of subject matter is one of these pronounced features. The other psalms are generally multi-themed poems, but not this one. Mac Laren is right: "One thought

pervades it—the surpassing excellence of the Law; and the beauty and power of the psalm lie in the unwearied reiteration of that single idea” (*Expos. Bible*, 291). In only four of its 176 verses (90, 121–122, 132) is there no direct mention of God’s law.

The author praises the law of Jehovah and expresses love for and adoration of it. He states his delight in both knowing it and submitting to it. He lauds it for its authority, its power, its majesty, its righteousness, its perfection, and its wisdom. He pledges his undying loyalty to it. For all of the multitude of statements that exalt the Divine statutes, there is yet a grand absence of repetition. Albert Barnes observed:

It is remarkable that a single subject could be pursued so far with so much variety, with so little that can be regarded as repetition; there are perhaps no two verses in the psalm so exactly similar that there cannot be seen, either in themselves, or in their connexion, some new shade of thought not expressed elsewhere (176).

One cannot read much of this psalm without being profoundly impressed with the earnest reverence the author had for the Will of God. Nor can any read it with an open mind and not be lifted to a greater reverence for inspired Scripture. We do it no violence to think of it as a collection of proverbs concerning God’s law.

An implied powerful message of this psalm, undergirding every verse, is the necessity of one’s knowing God’s revealed Truth. One cannot delight in it, trust in it, live by it, defend it against its enemies, or claim its promises without knowing thoroughly and intimately what it says. The psalmist obviously had such a knowledge, as must anyone in any age who would so highly exalt the testimonies of the Lord.

### **Structure**

This psalm is not only the longest psalm, but the longest chapter in the Bible, containing, as earlier mentioned, 176 verses. Moreover, the arrangement and organization of these verses is most unusual and clever. Several of the psalms (viz., 9–10, 25, 34, 37, et al.) are alphabetic or acrostic (the first word of the first verse begins with the first letter of the Hebrew alphabet, the second verse with the second letter, and so on).

However, the organizational uniqueness of the 119<sup>th</sup> Psalm is seen in that its 176 verses are equally divided into 22 stanzas, corresponding to the 22 letters of the Hebrew alphabet. Further, each stanza is composed of 8 verses (“octonaries”). In our English Bibles, the first stanza (vv. 1–8) is titled “Aleph,” which is the first letter of the Hebrew alphabet. In the Hebrew language, each verse of this octonary begins with a word that begins with the letter *aleph*. The second stanza is

titled “Beth” and each of its 8 verses begins with a word beginning with *beth*, and so on through the course of the 22 stanzas.

The purpose behind this unusual structural pattern has long been an object of curiosity and conjecture. While it is impossible to know this purpose or motive with certitude, some viable conjectures have been set forth. It may be that the structure was intended to serve as somewhat of an index of thought concerning God’s Word. Keil and Delitzsch recount a German Bible version that inscribes the psalm: “The Christian’s golden A B C of the praise, love, power, and use of the word of God” (243).

A plausible explanation may be that the psalm was so arranged for greater ease in memorizing it. Written copies of God’s law were extremely scarce in ancient times, so memorization of the law was a necessity for any Hebrew who was serious about serving God. A similar practice is observed today in the employment of alliteration by some in the structure of sermons and articles. If this practice does not help the hearer/reader to remember, it at least helps the speaker/writer to do so.

### **Designations for Scripture**

The author of this psalm employs various words to designate Scripture, which words he uses interchangeably and repeatedly. Rotherham identifies the following eight words, concerning which he provides an interesting chart that lists the verses in which these respective words are found (277–279):

1. Commandments.
2. Judgments (ordinances, decisions).
3. Law (Torah, instruction).
4. Precepts (charges).
5. Promise (sayings).
6. Statutes.
7. Testimonies.
8. Word (ways).

While some other expositors suggest a ninth or even a tenth term, these additional words generally overlap with one or more of the eight listed above. These eight words therefore well cover the gamut of expressions employed in reference to God’s utterances. Each of these appears twenty or more times in the psalm. These words severally connote various facets of Divine

revelation. They remind us of the variety of designations the New Testament contains in reference to that portion of the Bible (e.g., Gospel, doctrine, Word of God, the Truth, the faith, et al.).

### **Authorship**

The 119th Psalm resembles the Hebrews epistle in one respect: While the Holy Spirit is its author, there is a wide range of opinions concerning its human writer. There is very little in the psalm to help resolve this question. Some profess to see evidence that it was written during the Captivity and others, after the Jews returned from the Captivity under Nehemiah. Various ones have ascribed it to David, to an unnamed youth in the Assyrian Captivity, to Hezekiah, to Jaddua (mentioned in Neh. 12:22), who was high priest contemporary with Alexander the Great, and to someone in the cruel reign of Antiochus Epiphanes in the Maccabean period (i.e., between the Testaments).

Barnes is correct when he says:

All these are mere conjectures, and it is now impossible to ascertain the occasion on which the psalm was composed, or to determine who was its author. Nor is it necessary.... It is sufficient to know that it was composed under the guidance of the Holy Spirit and is a repository of truths which will be of inestimable value in all ages of the world (177).

Rather than attempting comments on every verse, I have arbitrarily chosen one verse from each stanza for extended exposition and application.

### **Selections from Stanzas 1-6**

#### ***Stanza 1 (Aleph)***

Verse 2: **“Blessed are they that keep his testimonies, That seek him with the whole heart.”** This beatitude constitutes a Hebrew parallelism in which the thoughts, rather than the concluding words “rhyme” and/or complement each other. The Scriptures are God’s “testimonies” in the sense that through them God bears witness to those things which are best for mankind. Barnes quipped on this clause: “Every law of a parent is to his children a testimony on his part of what is wise and right and good; and so, every law of God is his solemn testimony as to what is right and good for man” (178).

The devotion of the whole heart to God is emphasized several times in this psalm (i.e., vv. 10, 34, 69, 145). To seek God with the “whole heart” relates to singleness of purpose that makes other aims secondary. Herein lies the key to all of the incomparable work of the apostle Paul. He wrote: “One thing I do” (Phi. 3:13). The double-minded man is unstable in all his ways (Jam. 1:8). Seeking God with all of one’s heart implies a zeal that produces the full expenditure of energy in

the pursuit of His service. We see this principle in seeking God's kingdom and righteousness first (Mat. 6:33). The Lord reminds us that we can serve only one master ultimately (v. 24).

"Wholehearted" devotion to God bespeaks sincerity of desire and purpose that is devoid of pretense or hypocrisy for the sake of "show." To seek God with wholeness of heart is reminiscent of the terse order Moses gave to Israel: "Thou shalt love Jehovah thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy might" (Deu. 6:5). The Lord Jesus identified this command as "the great and first commandment" (Mat. 22:37-38).

The truly blessed are those who have such fullness of desire to please God that they scrupulously obey His Word. In this verse we have the lovely (and required) balance of inner dedication of heart that produces the outer service of obedience. Either trait in isolation is vain. We must worship God in sincerity of spirit and in keeping with His Truth (John 4:23-24). One seeks God in vain if he does so apart from His revelation, because therein alone do we learn the means and the meaning of "finding" God.

### *Stanza 2 (Beth)*

Verse 11: **"Thy word have I laid up in my heart, that I might not sin against thee."** This is surely one of the most familiar verses in this psalm, in fact, in all of the psalms. It should be committed not only to memory, but to practice, by everyone who is serious about serving God faithfully.

Spurgeon aptly ties this verse to the one preceding it ("Oh let me not wander from thy commandments"):

When a godly man sues for a favor from God he should carefully use every means for obtaining it, and accordingly, as the Psalmist had asked to be preserved from wandering, he here shows us the holy precaution which he had taken to prevent his falling into sin (158-59).

One who would ask God to prevent His wandering from His commandments is obligated to do all within his own power to avoid doing so.

We may also observe a natural connection between the truths stated in verses 11 and 9: "Wherewith shall a young man cleanse his way? By taking heed thereto according to thy word" (v. 9). This verse emphasizes the power of the Word, when followed, to **correct** impurities, while verse 11, emphasizes the Word's power, when laid up in the heart, to **prevent** sin and **maintain** a pure life, once attained.

*Hid* (KJV) or *laid up* (ASV) is from a word that has various shades of meaning, according to Barnes:

The word rendered **hid** means properly to conceal, so that a thing may be secret, private, inaccessible; then, to lay up in private, to treasure up, to hoard—as money or jewels—commonly **hidden** from public view. Then it means...to lay up knowledge or wisdom in the heart as a treasure... (181).

The psalmist is in no way ashamed of having the Word of God in his heart, so he is not seeking to conceal or hide the fact that it is there. Nor does he refer to its inaccessibility, since the purpose of the Word's deposit in his heart is to have it constantly accessible for any temptation that may assail him. He may have reference to his hoarding the Word of God in great quantity, as one would riches. Though hidden from public view because it is comprised by thought and knowledge, God's Word is nonetheless there when needed (cf. Pro. 2:1; 7:1). The New Testament counterpart to this idea is Paul's exhortation: "Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly..." (Col. 3:16a).

Barnes suggests the following:

The meaning here is, that he had **treasured** up the Word of God, as the most valuable thing, in his heart; it was **there**, though unseen; it constituted the secret power by which he was governed; it was permanently deposited there, as the most valuable of his treasures (181).

Whether or not the above suggestion is specifically what the psalmist meant to convey, it does fit the context and does not conflict with any other principle of Holy Writ. Filling the heart (mind) with the Word of God is the best and surest of all preventive tactics.

Note that the Word of God is not to be literally worn on an armband or a headband, as the Jews of Jesus' day were doing (and as some today still do) with their ostentatious phylacteries (Mat. 23:5). Rather, we must "internalize" the infallible Word in the heart, "for out of it are the issues of life" (Pro. 4:23). Mac Laren said it well:

And so, when the psalmist says, "I have hid Thy Word within my heart," he means, "I have buried it deep in the very midst of my being, and put it down at the very roots of myself, and there incorporated it with the very substance of my soul" (*Expos. of Holy Scripture*, 293).

How is this to be accomplished, except through insatiable, unrelenting, never ceasing reading and studying of the inspired text? Is it any wonder so many saints yield to the lusts of the flesh, who never nourish their souls between Sunday morning sermons? Do we marvel that so many, so abysmally ignorant of inspired Truth, have been led astray doctrinally by the religious puffed pipers who have apostatized? Given the general ignorance level in rank and file soldiers in

the Lord's army, the marvel is that more have not deserted to the enemy. The devil sometimes finds a point of vulnerability in even the most devoted saints (e.g., David, Peter, et al.), but these are the exceptions. The Divine rule in this verse is that the more of God's Word we have in our hearts (not the more direct work of the Holy Spirit we have **on** our hearts), the greater our strength to withstand the seductions of Satan (cf. Eph. 6:10-17). Jesus said: "Blessed are they that hunger and thirst after righteousness..." (Mat. 5:6).

### *Stanza 3 (Gimel)*

Verse 24: "**Thy testimonies also are my delight and my counsellors.**" This succinct statement is an echo of the opening words of Israel's inspired hymnbook:

Blessed is the man that walketh not in the counsel of the wicked, Nor standeth in the way of sinners, Nor sitteth in the seat of scoffers: But his delight is in the law of Jehovah; And on his law doth he meditate day and night (Psa. 1:1-2).

The psalmist expressed his "delight" in the Lord's Word eight additional times in the course of the 119th Psalm.

The immediate setting that seems to have provoked this declaration of delight in and dependence upon God's law is the rejection of and accusations against the psalmist by those in authority (v. 23). In the face of such rejection, he finds delightful refuge, pleasure, and comfort in God's testimonies. Attributing these words to David, Matthew Henry commented: "Did the affliction make him sad? The Word of God comforted him, and was **his delight**, more his delight than any of the pleasures either of court or camp, of city or country" (691).

Who but the most abject fool or adamant infidel (is there a difference?) can read and meditate long upon the inspired pages without **learning** to delight in them, even if he did not do so at their first reading? One cannot genuinely delight in any message without agreeing with it and without desiring to implement it, which the psalmist obviously was seeking ever to do. So when earthly counselors failed him and turned against him, he found sweet counsel, advice, and direction in heavenly Truth. Regardless of those who assailed him, he knew he was right as long as he lived by the Divine counsel in which he delighted. Mac Laren commented on this part of the verse: "Not only are they [i.e., God's testimonies] his delights, but "the men of his counsel," in whom he, solitary as he is, finds companionship that arms him with resources against that knot of whispering enemies" (*Expos. Bible*, 293).

Does one who delights in the Word avoid the Bible class hour on Sunday morning or Wednesday night? Does one who delights in the Word treat carelessly the Sunday evening

worship assembly? Does one who delights in the Word find daily time for television, the newspaper, magazines, novels, movies, and Internet surfing, and many other such “intellectual exercises,” but cannot find at least a few minutes a day even to read the Book of books? Does one who delights in the Word spend money on books and magazines for his reading pleasure, but has no interest in buying good materials that will strengthen his faith and help him to understand the Bible? To ask all such questions is to answer them.

When one delights in the Lord’s testimonies, he will not have to be begged to cause him to study it or reproved for not doing so. He will rather willingly seek the faithful counsel of its pages.

#### **Stanza 4 (Daleth)**

Verse 28: **“My soul melteth for heaviness: Strengthen thou me according unto thy word.”** Adam Clarke notes that the Hebrew word translated “melteth” “...signifies to distil, to drop as tears from the eye” (612). Mac Laren quotes an unidentified version that renders the first clause of this verse: “My soul weeps itself away for grief” (*Expos. Bible*, 293). We have here a heavy, broken, and disconsolate soul, one who has reached the end of his reserves. He has “hit bottom” and is wasting away.

Such heaviness may come from the loss of a loved one, mistreatment at the hands of one’s enemies, betrayal by one’s friends, unfaithfulness by one’s spouse, godly sorrow over one’s sins, the apostasy of those who once served God, the moral decline of our nation, or a number of other things. It is certain that all of God’s children will sooner or later go through times of great discouragement, when it is difficult to discover any silver linings to the clouds that overshadow us. Those who intimate that it is sinful for a Christian ever to be discouraged are as unrealistic as they are unbiblical. Some of the greatest Saints in all of the ages (e.g., Moses, Elijah, Jeremiah, Paul, et al., including the Son of God) became greatly discouraged at times. It is not sinful to be discouraged; it is human.

Sad to say, often those who become discouraged avoid and/or reject the greatest source that can give them strength. This psalmist knew where to turn – to God’s Word. The last clause of this verse is capable of either of two legitimate meanings: (1) *According unto thy word* may mean in accordance with the promise in God’s Word that He has not abandoned us and will provide strength for our times of discouragement. He indeed has promised: “For himself hath said, I will in no wise fail thee, neither will I in any wise forsake thee” (Heb. 13:5b), and this is a strengthening and encouraging promise we should all hold dear. (2) *According unto thy word* may



be a reference to the multitude of spiritual resources the Word of God contains. Its teachings, reproofs, corrections, and righteous instructions are quite able to make us complete unto every good work when taken to heart and put into practice (2 Tim. 3:16-17). If we are to be “strong in the power of His might,” we will find it only in the panoply furnished by the Holy Spirit’s Word (Eph. 6:10-17).

Whichever of the two meanings we choose, the strength that we receive is not promised or supplied in some direct way by the Holy Spirit. Does the Holy Spirit supply strength to us? Most certainly. However, he does so through the agency of His spiritual sword, the inspired Word (Eph. 6:17). When saints neglect the Word of God, they deprive themselves of the greatest of all sources of spiritual strength, comfort, and encouragement in existence, given at immeasurable cost for our blessing and ultimate salvation.

#### *Stanza 5 (He)*

Verse 36: **“Incline my heart unto thy testimonies, and not to covetousness.”** This verse states the two principal ongoing antagonistic approaches to life: Shall we live for spiritual and eternal interests, or shall we live merely for material and temporal prosperity? All men must choose one or the other, for none can serve both philosophies simultaneously. The Lord clearly defined this distinction:

No man can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other; or else he will hold to one and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon (Mat. 6:24).

We can (and should) all join the psalmist’s prayer that God will incline our hearts to His will. However, we should no more expect God to directly infuse such an inclination in our wills than that He will directly furnish us with spiritual strength (see comments on v. 28). He helps us in these and many other ways through agency and means, such as his providential work “behind the scenes” and His sufficient Word. This prayer sincerely prayed will obligate the one who prays it actively to pursue spiritual aims, including the serious study of the Bible and the employment of one’s talents in the service of others and of God, according to his abilities and opportunities. Such spiritual employments, faithfully followed, will make the trappings and trinkets of this world less and less appealing.

While there are many other temptations that cause men and women to forsake God or never come to Him following childhood, covetousness stands above the rest as representative of them all. This is why Paul wrote so plainly on the subject:

But they that are minded to be rich fall into a temptation and a snare and many foolish and hurtful lusts, such as drown men in destruction and perdition. For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil: which some reaching after have been led astray from the faith, and have pierced themselves through with many sorrows. But thou, O man of God, flee these things; and follow after righteousness, godliness, faith, love, patience, meekness (1 Tim. 6:9-11).

Barnes compares the prayer of the psalmist here to a statement in Jesus' model prayer:

The language is similar to that in the Lord's prayer [*sic*]—"And lead us not into temptation." That is, restrain us from it; let us not be put in circumstances where we shall be in danger of it. We are not to suppose that God exerts any **positive** [i.e., direct, DM] influence either to make a man covetous, or to tempt him (Jam. 1:13-14) (189).

We could wish that certain brethren could see as clearly as Barnes apparently did that God does not have to do something **directly** for Him to be doing it, such as inclining our hearts toward His Word or keeping us from covetousness or other temptations. The psalmist prays a noble prayer in this verse, one worthy of emulation by every child of God.

#### *Stanza 6 (Vav)*

Verse 42: **"So shall I have an answer for him that reproacheth me; For I trust in thy word."** Thus, the Lord withstood Satan at each wilderness temptation by trust in and use of Scripture: "It is written" (Mat. 4:4, 7, 10). Peter exhorts:

...sanctify in your hearts Christ as Lord: being ready always to give answer to every man that asketh you a reason concerning the hope that is in you, yet with meekness and fear (1 Pet. 3:15).

Not all who ask us questions about the Bible do so with reproach in mind, although some certainly do. However, the only way we can be prepared to answer querists, regardless of their motives, is by such a trust in God's Word that has driven us to study it seriously. To enable us to answer questions about our faith and practice is not the only noble motive for being avid students of the Word, but it is certainly a worthy one.

The Word of God is utterly trustworthy. What He promised, whether for good or ill, He will fulfill. What His Word said when it was a fresh revelation and what it says now, almost two thousand years hence, is exactly what it will say at The Judgment. The Word of God is as sure as God Himself, for it reflects His immutable nature. In spite of this obvious fact, some claiming to be our brethren have abandoned that ultimate trust in Biblical Truth, and, on crucial salvation issues at that. In the February 2000 Abilene Christian University Lectureship, President Royce Money said of John 3:5:

I assume it's still true. That's the rule, but what about the exceptions? What about countless believers...whose spirituality and Christian virtues at times far outstrip mine? What about all that? I don't know, but the Lord knows exceptions and I hope He makes a lot of them. Our job, it seems to me, is to teach the rule and let the Lord make the exceptions [long and loud applause] (tape transcript).

As liberals often do, President Money put his brain in neutral and raced the engine of his emotions in the foregoing statement. He just does not believe that the Son of God, Who will judge all mankind (John 5:22, 27; Acts 16:31) meant what He said in John 3:5. In a passage in which Jesus explicitly denied any exceptions to His stated rule, Money boldly professes to find many. He implies that God is obligated to make exceptions to His law concerning baptism and salvation because there are so many "spiritual believers" out there who do not believe in it. This is vintage denominational and liberal garbage. It strikes at the root of the exclusiveness of Christianity. If the unbaptized "good, sincere, 'spiritual' believers" will be exceptions, what about the good moral unbelievers (Atheists, Hindus, Muslims, et al.)?

The "Money Version" of John 3:5 reads: "Except **some** be born of water and the Spirit, they cannot enter into the kingdom of God. Others can enter without doing so." Obviously, this man has ceased to trust in the Word of God because He believes the Lord has changed His mind. Listen carefully, Dr. Money: It is not our job to teach the rule **and** suggest that the Lord will make exceptions. Our job is to teach the rule — **period** (Mat. 28:19–20; Mark 16:15–16).

Some who are not tinged with liberalism have sometimes drifted into the "God-may-change-His-mind" syndrome. Those who say, "If the Lord at The Judgment chooses to save some without baptism, I will not object," need to think more carefully about what they are implying. Of course, no mere man should object to anything that God does, but where is even the slightest hint that God has changed His mind or will change His mind about requirements for salvation? Such statements suggest that the Lord did not really mean what He said in His Word about baptism. If not about baptism, what about lying and adultery, or several other subjects that are so explicitly set forth as obligatory teaching? Even a hint of such an attitude implies a lack of absolute trust in the verity and immutability of the Word of God.

### **Selections from Stanzas 7–14**

#### ***Stanza 7 (Zayin)***

Verse 51: "**The proud have had me greatly in derision: Yet have I not swerved from thy law.**" The one who penned these words had been subjected to jeering, railing, and derision, doubtless because of His faithfulness to God. This is just like the proud, who are so full of

themselves that they despise even the idea of anyone greater than they are, including God Almighty. The proud hate and persecute God's children, just because of this "family connection." It has ever been as Jesus promised the apostles it would be:

A servant is not greater than his lord. If they persecuted me, they will also persecute you; if they kept my word, they will keep yours also (John 15:20).

Pride causes many to perpetrate much ungodliness and mischief. Little wonder that God warns us about it so often (e.g., Pro. 8:13; 15:25; 16:5, 18; et al.). Liberal folk who have gone out from among us (such as Dr. Money above) in their antinomian pride, think it fine sport to deride and ridicule the rest of us. They profess to have outgrown the need for Scriptural authority for all that we do and say (Col. 3:17), and they brand as "legalists" all who still insist that we must have it to please God.

The ungodly "peer pressure" applied by such pride-filled folk has been more than some have withstood, and they have swerved from the law of God into the ditch of error and apostasy. Some of the administrators and professors who teach in universities founded by brethren have admitted that they and their schools cannot bear to be thought of as judgmental and exclusivistic by their peers from denominational and/or secular schools. They have thereby turned from God's law. Eldershops in many congregations have let intimidating and threatening members, usually those with some wealth, cause them to turn from the law of God, thus leading their entire congregations to swerve. A large number of preachers have also veered from the Truth over the past half century, bowing to the pressure to "update" the church in terms of current culture.

How greatly does the Lord need more stalwart souls who will not allow contempt, scorn, or abuse of any sort to cause them to swerve from the law. One thus swerves at his own spiritual peril, for the only other way besides the Lord's straitened way is the broad way that ends in destruction (Mat. 7:13).

#### ***Stanza 8 (Hheth)***

Verse 59: **"I thought on my ways, and turned my feet unto thy testimonies."** This is a beautiful statement of the fullness of the meaning of repentance. Repentance begins in our thought processes. Whether by reading or hearing a portion of God's Word that pricks our hearts (Acts 2:37), having someone explicitly call our sins to our attention as Nathan did David (2 Sam. 12:7), being put to shame by righteous example as a husband might be by a godly wife (1 Pet. 3:1), or by some other factor, "godly sorrow" is provoked in the one who has sinned (2 Cor. 7:9). This "godly sorrow" is not repentance, but, if not quenched, it will produce repentance (v. 10).

*Repentance* translates *metanoia*, a Greek word that denotes a change of mind, in which one determines to turn from sin and error and, correspondingly, turn to God. In the very nature of the case, to decide to change and then to fail to do so is vain. Thus, the definition of the word itself implies the change in one's life that reflects the change in one's mind concerning sin and things pertaining to God. The psalmist correctly follows the **meditation** upon his erroneous ways by **turning his feet** to the testimonies of Jehovah.

The fullness of this definition is also seen in a statement by Ezekiel: "Because he considereth, and turneth away from all his transgressions that he hath committed, he shall surely live, he shall not die" (18:28). Note the mental activity ("he considereth"), followed by the practical activity ("turneth away"). Only then does the prophet promise life rather than death. John came not only preaching *repentance* (Mat. 3:2) but *bring forth therefore fruits worthy of repentance* (Luke 3:8, *emph. DM*; cf. Acts 26:20).

To those who are spiritually minded, few things are more beautiful and thrilling to observe than repentance at work. David, the prodigal son, and the 3,000 on Pentecost are all notable examples of it. Those who have preached for several years can doubtless recall several individuals upon whom the powerful, saving Gospel had its effect, bringing sinners to repentance.

#### ***Stanza 9 (Teth)***

Verse 67: "**Before I was afflicted I went astray; but now I observe thy word.**" A twin verse appears in this same stanza: "It is good for me that I have been afflicted; that I may learn thy statutes" (71). Mac Laren observed the following subtle distinction in the two statements:

There [v. 67] the beneficent influence of sorrow was simply declared as a fact; here [v. 71] it is thankfully accepted, with full submission and consent of the will (*Expos. Bible*, 297).

The experience of the psalmist reminds us of Job in one respect: He had at one time lived in peace and prosperity, but, as with Job, had come to know affliction. However, the psalmist admits to having gone astray in the time of his comfort and plenty, the opposite of which was so with Job. He came to know affliction, not because he had gone astray, but because he was upright above all others (Job 1:1, 8). This verse of the psalm, the case of Job, and several other circumstances and statements found in Scripture bring before us the relationship that afflictions of various kinds can and should have to righteousness.

The philosophy of retribution was widely believed in the ancient world and is still alive today. It holds that the suffering and misfortune of an individual or of a specific group of persons

(e.g., a city) is a direct result of sin in their lives, for which they are paying direct or immediate retribution. Job's "friends" were adamant advocates of this philosophy concerning the sufferings of that ancient patriarch. The apostles assumed the verity of this concept when they said of the blind man: "And his disciples asked him, saying, Rabbi, who sinned, this man, or his parents, that he should be born blind?" (John 9:2). This philosophy surfaces whenever a town is washed away by flood waters or is blown away by a tornado. Some are always quick to speculate that it was a direct judgment of God upon them.

No one can deny that God has in some cases brought affliction, and even destruction, upon certain ones as immediate judgment for their sins (e.g., Cain, Sodom and her sister cities, Israel [numerous times], Miriam, the Canaanite nations, Saul, David, et al.). Neither can it be denied that some of the most righteous folk who have ever lived have suffered great affliction. While the curtain of revelation is pulled back allowing **us** to see the basis of Job's gross sufferings, he was utterly at a loss to understand or explain them, except to deny that they were because of evil in his life. Hannah and Elizabeth were barren, John was beheaded, Stephen was stoned to death, Paul had his "thorn in the flesh," and, to top all others, the only perfect One Who ever lived was shamefully treated and nailed to a cross. There is no hint that the afflictions of any of these were because of their sins. In the Lord's case, it was not even **possible** that He thus was caused to suffer. There seems to be this pattern relating to retributive suffering: Where God has inflicted direct retribution because of sin, He tells us so. Where he has not so informed us, we should be extremely cautious about making any such assignment of cause.

The Lord struck a dagger through the heart of the false retribution philosophy in his response to the apostles concerning the blind man: "Neither did this man sin, nor his parents: but that the works of God should be made manifest in him" (John 9:3). He also struck this philosophy a mortal blow on another occasion:

And he answered and said unto them, Think ye that these Galilaeans were sinners above all the Galilaeans, because they have suffered these things? I tell you, Nay: but, except ye repent, ye shall all in like manner perish. Or those eighteen, upon whom the tower in Siloam fell, and killed them, think ye that they were offenders above all the men that dwell in Jerusalem? I tell you, Nay: but, except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish (Luke 13:2-5).

The larger question of why the righteous suffer, indeed, why human suffering exists at all, is one that men have discussed for ages, and which space forbids further discussion of here. However, in summary, we have seen that the cases of immediate retribution for sin are

exceptional, rather than constant or universal. We may also observe that it is always appropriate for us to engage in self-examination, in both the good times and the bad: “Take heed to thyself, and to thy teaching. Continue in these things; for in doing this thou shalt save both thyself and them that hear thee” (1 Tim. 4:16; 1 Cor. 11:28; 2 Cor. 13:5; et al.). While our troubles in this life may not be directly related to sin, as with the psalmist, it is good when troubles cause the sinner to reflect on his life and repent, as did the psalmist.

### *Stanza 10 (Yodh)*

Verse 80: **“Let my heart be perfect in thy statutes, that I be not put to shame.”** The great truth of this verse is that the only way to live a shameless and blameless life is to have a heart devoted to the law of God. Note that this passage speaks of not merely a casual acquaintance with God’s will or an occasional nod in its direction, but of a heart that is fully attuned to and established in it. On the word *perfect* in this verse, Adam Clarke commented: “Let it [i.e., the heart] be perfect—all given up to thee, and all possessed by thee” (618). Rawlinson wrote on the same clause of this verse: “‘Perfect in thy statutes’—in the knowledge and in the practice of them” (108). It is interesting to note that the *Septuagint*, as quoted by Spurgeon, reads: “Let my heart be without spot and blemish” (301). The idea is that one should have an unadulterated and unalloyed dedication and loyalty to the Divine will.

The aim of this brief petition to God is that one might not suffer shame or have anything of which to be ashamed, either before God or man. Whether this plea refers to present time or to The Judgment, one should not want to suffer shame in either case, though in the latter, the damage will be irreparable. As Matthew Henry noted: “Shame is the portion of hypocrites, either here, if it be repented of, or hereafter, if it be not” (703).

Keil and Delitzsch add: “He desires unreserved, faultless, unwavering adherence to God’s word, for only in this is he secure against being ignominiously undeceived” (253).

The New Testament counterpart of the core of this verse, though in the form of a command, rather than of a petition to God, is from Paul: “Give diligence to present thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, handling aright the word of truth” (2 Tim. 2:15). The only means by which anyone has ever been able to live so as to be approved of God, whether in this world or at The Judgment is by handling aright the Word of Truth. This right “handling” of the Word involves the correct application of correct hermeneutical principles, followed by correct application to life of the Truths learned.

### ***Stanza 11 (Caph)***

Verse: **“All thy commandments are faithful: They persecute me wrongfully; Help thou me”** (Psa. 119:86). This statement appears in a stanza that centers entirely on a prayer for deliverance from persecution. In the midst of cruel wrongful plots against the psalmist, he still promises, “Yet do I not forget thy statutes” (v. 83.) The reason he holds on tenaciously to God’s law is his firm conviction that “all thy commandments are faithful.”

Men, perhaps even friends and kindred, have turned against him and prove unfaithful, but he holds firm to his conviction that “all thy commandments are faithful.” Barnes informs us: “The idea in the Hebrew is that they are worthy to be relied on. They are founded in truth, and they should secure our confidence” (108). Williams adds that the word *faithful* connotes “trustworthy, true” (376). Mac Laren calls attention to “the antithesis in ver. 86, between the ‘faithfulness’ of the law and the ‘lying’ persecutors” (*Expos. Bible*, 298).

When all men fail us, God’s Word remains faithful: “Yea, let God be found true, but every man a liar” (Rom. 3:4a). When men forget their promises and renege on their covenants, God’s promises remain sure: “Let us hold fast the confession of our hope that it waver not; for he is faithful that promised” (Heb. 10:23). God can no more lie than He can die (Tit. 1:2; Heb. 6:18). The faithfulness, certainty, dependability, and truthfulness of God’s Word are rooted in these very traits in the nature of God Himself.

Denying Biblical inspiration, some allege that the Bible is not trustworthy in such areas as its geographical and historical records. They further avow that we cannot depend upon the Biblical record of the origin of man and the universe in which we live, for, they say, it is rooted in legend and myth and was written by men untrained and uninformed in scientific disciplines. Modernistic theologians, while claiming to be its friends, have stabbed the Sacred Volume in the back by averring that we cannot depend on the documents the Bible attributes to Moses, Isaiah, Paul and others to have been actually written by these men. A favorite ploy is to admit that the Bible is “inspired” in its broad themes and thoughts, and that it therefore “contains” the Word of God. For ages, by such tactics various ones have been trying to destroy the Bible by destroying the confidence of all men in much of its content.

Ironically, some of these “friends” of the Bible, after doing all they can to undermine the Biblical claims of verbal inspiration (and, therefore, of infallibility and inerrancy), still feebly claim that in matters pertaining to salvation and morality “all thy commandments are faithful.” It is evident that we cannot disparage one type of material in the Bible without disparaging all and



be consistent in any respect. If we cannot trust the Bible's historical, geographical, and scientific data, on what basis can we logically trust any of its data?

It is further evident that those who constantly debunk the accuracy of the aforementioned materials in the Bible, but vainly attempt to defend its moral and spiritual content, pay little attention indeed to either of the latter. The denominational theologians pay no attention to the moral standards of the Bible when it becomes unpopular to do so. The "mainline" denominations (Methodists, Presbyterians, et al.) long ago gave up any scruples on such moral issues as drinking, marriage, divorce, and remarriage, and immodest apparel. Furthermore, they have embraced the abomination of abortion and appear on the verge of doing the same for homosexuality. Moreover, they have never understood (or accepted if they understood), the teaching of the Lord on what one must do to be saved. They prattle needlessly and emptily about their ability to depend on the moral and spiritual content of the Bible as from God. Were they sincere, surely they would pay it more than the lip service they give it.

The psalmist is accurate in his declaration of the Bible's faithfulness. Time after time the pick, spade, sifter, and brush of the archaeologist have proved the flawlessness of the Biblical records regarding ancient civilizations, locations, rulers, and events. While never claiming to be a book on science, where the Bible touches on such matters, it is consistently accurate and has demonstrated a prescient ability that is inexplicable apart from Divine foreknowledge revealed to the writers of such materials. These statements tell of things such as the rotundity of the earth and the force of gravity that were impossible to discover until many centuries later with the invention of instruments by which they could be discovered. And, while the pitiful, infantile evolutionists scream and holler when they even hear the words *creation* or *intelligent design* mentioned, they still have nothing but an irrational, unproved and unprovable guess about the origin of our universe. On the other hand, the Bible gives the only rational explanation of how all things came to be – an eternal, self-existent, omnipotent, omniscient Being – the very God the Bible sets forth. The Bible – all of its commandments, precepts, and statements – are faithful.

### ***Stanza 12 (Lamedh)***

Verse 89: **"Forever, O Jehovah, Thy word is settled in heaven."** It is impossible to imagine a stronger warranty for anything than that which is "settled in heaven." The force of this statement is that God's Word is final, sure, immutable, and eternal – because God Himself has settled it. Bill Jackson commented: "David's repeated confidence in the Word of God rests in his utterance here: God's Word is settled, at the throne of God, and is settled permanently" (319).

When any matter is “settled in Heaven,” it is settled fully, certainly, perfectly, and indestructibly. For these reasons the Lord said of His Word: “The Scripture cannot be broken” (John 10:35). Though spoken specifically concerning His warnings of the destruction of Jerusalem, the Lord’s statement is nonetheless true of all of God’s Word: “Heaven and earth shall pass away, but my words shall not pass away” (Mat. 24:35).

On the word *settled*, Barnes commented:

The word rendered *settled* means properly *to set, to put, to place*; and then, to stand, to cause to stand, to set up, as a column.... The meaning here is, that the Word – the law – the promise – of God was made firm, established, stable, in heaven; and would be so for ever and ever. What God had ordained as law would always remain law; what He had affirmed would always remain true; what He had promised would be sure for ever (204).

We live in a world of constant change and flux. Nothing pertaining to our material world and our lives in it long remains the same. Williams correctly observes:

Beyond change is the changeless promise of God. Thus the psalmist turns to God’s Word and finds the mark of Heaven upon it. It is the one absolute for his life. It is settled in Heaven because God Himself has given it to us and it will be fulfilled by Him (378).

Because God’s Word is “settled in Heaven,” we can have the same absolute confidence in it that Peter expressed:

Being born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God, which liveth and abideth for ever. For all flesh is as grass, and all the glory of man as the flower of grass. The grass withereth, and the flower thereof falleth away: But the word of the Lord endureth for ever (1 Pet. 1:23–25a).

### *Stanza 13 (Mem)*

Verse 104: **“Through thy precepts I get understanding: Therefore I hate every false way.”** The “understanding” provided by the precepts of God is not mere knowledge of, but a proper, correct comprehension of what we learn from them. There is no true perspective on life or “world view” that is not rooted in Holy Writ. From it alone we gain an understanding of where we came from, why we are here, where we are going, how to live, and of sin and salvation. If a man had no other book besides the Bible and no other education than that gleaned from its pages, he would be superior in character to all of the most learned who are bereft of the inspired volume.

It is an inexplicable irony that the source of all true wisdom and understanding is so despised, opposed, and blasphemed as a **cause** of the world’s problems, rather than honored for the true **solutions** it offers. Perhaps more ironic is the fact that the Bible is shunned, avoided, neglected, and even rejected by most of those who profess to appreciate and believe it.

While God provides the source of the knowledge and understanding we need to be what He created us to be and to eventually dwell with Him in Heaven, He expects us to “dig out” this information. He does not place a funnel in our heads and pour in either knowledge or understanding that He requires of us. Nor does He, through the Holy Spirit, invest His children with wisdom in some direct, mysterious, immediate way, in addition to that which He has provided in His Word. Did He thus operate, His children (including those who ardently advocate that He so operates) would doubtless behave far more wisely in many circumstances than they sometimes have done.

It is not by some supposed “direct pipeline” that we gain understanding and wisdom that God would have us possess, but “through His precepts”. God places the responsibility upon **us** to acquire the knowledge of His will, from which we have access to the understanding and wisdom which we need and which He wants us to have. We cannot even recognize error, much less oppose it, if we do not have the understanding that comes only through the knowledge of Truth—God’s precepts. This knowledge comes from reading and studying His Word so that we “grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ” (2 Pet. 3:18).

The psalmist repeats the latter part of verse 104 in verse 128. When one sees and learns the Truth of God’s will in all of its beauty, how can he avoid the inclination to hate everything that opposes it? Every way that differs from or contradicts the way of Truth is a false way. One cannot love Truth very much who recognizes the evil and error that oppose it and that lead to death yet manifests no repulsion at it. Thus, one measure of a man’s love of the right is how much he hates the wrong.

Those sissified, spineless saints who cringe in horror when a bold Christian dares to expose errors and evils and their promoters that are so prolific in the church today, only pretend to love the Truth. They rather lend their talents to protecting the false teacher and his false doctrine, and by their words and deeds they prove that they love them more than they love the Lord, His Truth, and His faithful people. We must love the Truth and hate evil and error so much that we will never cease to “prove the spirits, whether they are of God; because many false prophets are gone out into the world” (1 John 4:1).

Our postmodern, pluralistic, hyper-tolerant age holds that there is no false way (except the way that says there are false ways, of course). It would have us believe that Buddha is as credible and powerful as Jehovah and that Mohammed is a prophet of at least equal stature with Christ. However, the psalmist (as do all men in their rational moments) dared indicate that some ways

are false. The true and natural counterpart of esteeming the way of Truth—God’s way, as revealed in His Word—is to hate every false way. Jackson adds an important caution: “Not hatred of the false man, but of his ways” (320).

#### ***Stanza 14 (Nun)***

Verse 105: **“Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and light unto my path.”** This may be the most familiar verse of the entire psalm. The idea it conveys is by all means one of the most important ones. *Darkness* is a symbol both of evil and ignorance, while *light* stands for such things as righteousness, knowledge, and Truth. Looming behind this beautiful statement is the assumption that we are walking through a world of darkness. We need a source of light to help us and preserve us as we make our way in this pilgrimage.

When we travel the roadways at night, the informational and warning signs, the streetlights, and our vehicle’s headlights are all necessary for our safety. The daily paths we walk are perilous. There are obstacles over which we may stumble and fall. There are strange paths on to which we may stray, which would completely change the course of our lives. There are dangerous precipices, which, if not avoided, we may plunge down to our destruction. Thus our feet need signs that give warnings and other information to keep them walking aright. We need a light to illuminate our way and to keep us from stumbling. God in His mercy has provided these needs in His revelation.

The light that we need to get us to Heaven is in the Word of God alone. We concede that there may be some pleasant, interesting, and even wise sayings in other books that purport to provide spiritual enlightenment and/or salvation (e.g., Book of Mormon, the Koran, *Science and Health and Key to the Scriptures*, et al.). However, only God’s Word—the Bible—is the fullness of the light and lamp that will take us home to God at last. We must remember that the brightest light is of no benefit in the darkness if one never turns it on. One may as well have no Bible if he is not going to access its light by reading and study of it.

#### ***Stanza 15 (Shamekh)***

Verse 114: **“Thou art my hiding place and my shield: I hope in thy word.”** The psalmist emphasizes three important provisions of God’s Word in this passage. First, it is his hiding-place. This is similar to David’s statement in Psalm 32: 7: “Thou art my hiding-place.” The means by which God hides and protects His children from the tempter is by means of His Word: “Thy word have I laid up in my heart, that I might not sin against thee” (Psa. 119:11). The Lord found strength in it in each of His wilderness temptations (Mat. 4:1–11). There is safety, refuge, and

protection in the Truth of the Bible, but only when, and only to the degree that one has imbibed it. Those ignorant of God's Word have no spiritual security or means of defending themselves against the assaults of Satan in this wicked world.

The second point of emphasis is that the Word of God is his shield. While the Truth protects and hides us **from** danger, it also serves as a shield when we are **in** danger. The psalmist had earlier said: "As for God, his way is perfect: The word of Jehovah is tried; He is a shield unto all them that take refuge in him" (18:30). Did not the Lord use the written Word as His shield in His fierce wilderness combat with Satan (Mat. 4:4, 7, 10)? The "shield of faith" by which we are able to "quench all the fiery darts of the evil one," is closely tied to the spiritual resources of God's Word (Eph. 6:13-18). How seldom do so many seek the protective power of the Word of God.

Third, the psalmist stresses the hope he has in Jehovah's will. We have this hope because the Word is our hiding-place and our shield. We can be confident that it will not disappoint us or let us down, as Matthew Henry commented: "Those who depend on God's promise shall have the benefit of his power and be taken under his special protection" (710). This likely is the primary meaning of the clause. However, we may additionally note that God's Word is also the only message of hope in the sense of providing the means of salvation. This is why Paul wrote of the "hope of the gospel" (Col. 1:23). Only in the Gospel do we have the good news of the Savior Who died to save us and Who revealed the plan through which we can be cleansed by blood. Thus, we can say with the psalmist, "I hope in thy Word."

### *Stanza 16 (Ayin)*

Verse 127: **"I love thy commandments above gold, yea, above fine gold."** The twenty-one copies of the Gutenberg Bible – the first books printed on Johannes Gutenberg's printing press (the first moveable-type press) in the fifteenth century – are so rare that they are worth millions of dollars. However, the real worth of the Bible is not in the rarity or antiquity of a certain edition of it. The worth of the Word of God lies in the fact that it is just that – the Word of God. It is not only **a** revelation from the Almighty to His puny, helpless, and sinful creation, but it is **the** revelation of Himself and His Will.

The world (including many of the Bible's professed "friends") casts the Bible aside as worse than worthless. It is an impediment to those who live only for carnal pursuits. Aldous Huxley brazenly rejoiced when Charles Darwin published his *Origin of the Species*. It gave him and others like him an excuse to abandon the concept of an Infinite Creator Who has revealed His

Will through the Bible and Who will judge all men by that Divine standard someday. Huxley and his ilk, by adopting the evolutionary folly, thereby felt free to live in guiltless immoral abandon. Long since dead, he has awakened in the Hadean realm where he awaits The Judgment, to discover that Darwin's hypothesis was only wishful thinking. He and all like him who have passed into eternity would doubtless now give whatever fortunes they left behind, be they ever so large and did they still have them, to re-evaluate the Sacred Volume, even as the rich man in Luke 16:23–31.

One who loves the Bible will demonstrate it by his behavior. First, notice that the psalmist loves the **commandments** of God. There are many—including numerous apostates who once professed the old paths—who go to great pains to belittle, debunk, and minimize the commandments God and His Son have given us in the Bible. They have but one mantra: “All grace and no law.” To these folk any emphasis upon “commandment keeping” constitutes “legalism.” They seem to have no memory of the Lord's dictum: “If ye love me, ye will keep my commandments” (John 14:15). Paul obviously did not have the attitude of the commandment bashers: “Circumcision is nothing, and uncircumcision is nothing; but the keeping of the commandments of God” (1 Cor. 7:19). One cannot love the Word of God while hating His commandments.

Second, one who loves God's Word more than fine gold will not neglect it. He can never completely have his hunger and thirst satiated for its inspired information. Rather, he will ever study it and delight in doing so: “Oh how love I thy law! It is my meditation all the day” (Psa. 119:97). Matthew Henry stated on this idea:

David saw that that the word of God answers all purposes better than money does, for it enriches the soul towards God; and therefore he loved it better than gold, for it had done that for him which gold could not do, and would stand him in stead when the wealth of the world would fail him (713).

The person who professes love for the Word of God, but who refuses even to attend a Sunday morning and Wednesday evening Bible class is a self-proclaimed hypocrite. Such a one will hardly ever be found studying or even reading his Bible daily at home. The real Bible lover will set aside time for daily reading and study and will take advantage of every learning opportunity provided by congregational leaders.

### ***Stanza 17 (Pe)***

Verse 136: “**Streams of water run down mine eyes, Because they observe not thy law.**” This is a graphic expression of extreme sadness and grief. Jeremiah repeatedly used this same

figure to express the depth of his sorrow at the terrible destruction God's people had brought upon themselves (Jer. 9:1; 14:17; Lam. 1:16; 2:18; 3:48). In this psalm, the writer weeps profusely over his people's rejection of God's law, which would later bring upon them the destruction of Jeremiah's time.

How can the righteous see all of the wickedness and perversion in the world, and not grieve? How can God's people observe the widespread rebellion against God – the pervasive profanity and irreverence – that characterizes the masses, and not want to weep buckets of tears? Every time the name of Deity is used as a swear word, every time pornography is shoved in our faces, every time another God-hating liberal or secularist tries to stamp out the very memory of Him from our national consciousness, every time homosexuality and abortion are paraded as mere harmless “choices,” and every time some errant religionist tells men merely to “pray the sinner's prayer” to be saved, it should be like a dagger to the heart of those who love Truth and righteousness.

How can so many children of God see how sorely mankind needs the Gospel and not be moved to get it to them, either by sending or by taking it? Perhaps Adam Clarke has the answer: “How much had this blessed man the honor of God and the salvation of souls at heart! O for more of that spirit which mourns for the transgressions of the land! But we are not properly convinced of the exceeding sinfulness of sin” (625).

#### *Stanza 18 (Tsadhe)*

Verse 142: **“Thy righteousness is an everlasting righteousness, And thy law is truth.”** The theme of this entire stanza is the righteousness of God (vv. 137a, 142) and therefore of the righteousness of His Word (vv. 137b–138, 144). In the mind of the psalmist, as it should be in ours, there is no distinction between the righteousness of God and that same quality that radiates through His revealed Word. To say it another way, God's righteous testimonies are rooted in God's righteous nature and character.

The righteousness of God is not temporary or terminal. It is as everlasting as Deity Himself: “Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom can be no variation, neither shadow that is cast by turning” (Jam. 1:17). Our Lord does not change, waxing strong then weak, arbitrarily changing His will for us from day to day: “Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today, yea and for ever” (Heb. 13:8). We can depend upon the Bible with the same full dependence we have in the Father and the Son.

The foregoing fact implies that what His written revealed Word said when it was completed, it says now; and what that Word says now, it will say at The Judgment (John 12:48). Those who imply that the Lord may make some exceptions to His plan of salvation at The Judgment, surely do not realize the implications of their implication. Let those beware who say: "If the Lord wants to save some who have lived since Calvary without their being baptized unto remission of sins, I will not complain." They imply that Mark 16:16, John 3:5, Galatians 3:27, and similar statements may not be true after all. If they are not true, then God and His Son are not faithful and dependable—in fact, they will have lied to all mankind who read those categorically imperative passages. No man has the right to even hint that God will use any different standard at The Judgment besides His written Word.

The psalmist was not a postmodernist. He believed (1) in the existence of absolute, objective truth and (2) that in spiritual matters, that objective truth resided in God's law. He rephrased the same idea a few verses later: "Thou art nigh, O Jehovah; And all thy commandments are truth" (v. 151).

There could hardly be a more self-contradictory and self-defeating philosophy than that which contends that there is no such thing as absolute, objective truth. Do those who advocate such really believe their own contention? If they do, they thereby are implying that there is at least that one dictum that is an absolute truth.

Not only did the psalmist believe in the existence of truth, Jesus did as well. He echoed the psalmist's words in His prayer to the Father: "Thy word is truth" (John 17:17). He further stated: "And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free" (8:32). It is quite evident from the recorded words our Lord spoke that He believed and knew that truth existed and that what He taught was true. Further, He promised to send and sent the "Spirit of truth" (the Holy Spirit) to guide the apostles into all the truth (16:13). They spoke and wrote with the same authority and certainty that are common to true statements and doctrines. There is no such thing with any of the Biblical writers as a "your truth-my truth" approach to the things they recorded. Neither can anyone who wishes to serve the Christ and save the lost take any such approach.

That the psalmist wrote "thy law is truth" implies the existence of that which opposes and contradicts truth, namely error. The same irrational attitude that denies the existence of objective truth, also must, in order to be consistent, deny the existence of error. The popular attitude nowadays is so hyper-tolerant to almost every viewpoint that it allows even the most outrageous forms of speech, behavior, and philosophy equal credibility with righteousness and truth. The



only thing this attitude will not tolerate is the attitude that does not condone the absolute pluralism it advocates.

When this attitude invades the church it manifests itself in those who do not want to (1) hear about any errors being taught, (2) hear the refutation of those errors, and (3) hear who the perpetrators of these errors are (whether schools, congregations, papers, or individuals). It is as if such folk have decided that there is no such thing as false doctrine and that false teachers are the figments of radical, overly suspicious imaginations. If this be the case, it will be difficult to explain the numerous, repeated, and explicit warnings in the Bible concerning both false teaching and false teachers. If we remain firmly rooted in the truth that “thy law is truth” we will not adopt such philosophies of fools that deny the existence of either truth or error.

### *Stanza 19 (Qoph)*

Verses 147–48: **“I anticipated the dawning of the morning, and cried: I hoped in thy words. Mine eyes anticipated the night-watches, That I might meditate on thy word.”** The writer apparently refers here to his engaging in prayer and meditation on God’s Word even before the day dawned. Matthew Henry agrees: “He began the day with God. The first thing he did in the morning, before he admitted any business, was to pray, when his mind was most fresh and in the best frame” (716). This “crying” to God was based upon the hope the psalmist had in God’s Word, that is, his reliance upon God’s promises to hear and to respond. His hope in the Word was so sure and full that he made opportunities to meditate upon it.

Those of us who teach, preach, and serve as elders need to lay more emphasis upon a daily period of devotion to God. The early morning may be best for some, as for the psalmist, but this time may be impossible for others. Whenever we chose to do it, each of us needs to make the time to at least read a portion of the Sacred text and pray each day. In an increasingly secular and wicked world we all sorely need to nourish our souls daily, perhaps even more critically than we do our bodies. For want of nourishment, they will both weaken, then shrivel, and at last, die. Note that this practice was not one dreaded or begrudged, but joyfully anticipated, as indeed it should be for each of us.

### *Stanza 20 (Resh)*

Verse 160: **“The sum of thy word is truth; and every one of thy righteous ordinances endureth for ever.”** This two-fold claim is one of the most marvelous of all claims made by any inspired writer concerning the Bible. Although the content of the latter half of the verse is stated elsewhere (e.g., v. 144; 1 Pet. 1:23–25; et al.), the first simple statement is unique. *The sum of thy*

*word* may mean that the psalmist has searched through every part of God's Word and found that it was/is truth throughout. Thus, the KJV reads: "Thy word is true from the beginning." The sense may be that from the beginning to the end, it is all true. Adam Clarke suggests that the word *beginning* (as rendered in the KJV) may have an even more literal meaning:

Does he refer to the **first word** in the Book of Genesis..."in the beginning?"... Every word thou hast spoken from the first in ...Genesis to the end of the law and prophets, and all thou wilt yet speak, as flowing from the **fountain of truth**, must be true; and all shall have in due time, their fulfillment (628).

This statement may also mean that only when we have brought together the entirety of God's Word on any subject do we have all of the Truth on it. This inductive approach to Scripture is sometimes called "Baconian," after the eighteenth-century British scholar-philosopher, Sir Francis Bacon. However, we see the seed of it in this psalm and we can observe inspired men following the same procedure.

The application of this principle is more than merely a **valuable** hermeneutical rule; it is a **necessary** one. For lack of its application, false doctrines abound and flourish. Centuries ago Roman Catholic theologians pulled a few select verses out of 1 Corinthians 7, totally ignoring other statements in the very same chapter (especially that Paul was addressing a special circumstance, vv. 26-38), and justified a celibate priesthood. Martin Luther made this same lethal mistake when he concocted his "faith alone" dogma by relying on a few passages that speak of salvation "by faith" to the exclusion of other passages on the conditions of pardon (particularly excluding what James wrote, denying its inspiration in his zeal for his hobby). John Calvin made this same crucial error several times, else he could never have invented his monstrous theological system. Joseph Smith based his "baptism for the dead" heresy on 1 Corinthians 15:29 to the exclusion of every other Scriptural statement on baptism and salvation.

Let us ever be fair with God's Word, remembering that, seldom, if ever, do we find the totality of God's Truth neatly and succinctly stated in one single verse or context. Rather, the **sum** of God's Word is Truth.

### ***Stanza 21 (Shin)***

Verse 162: "**I rejoice at thy word, As one that findeth great spoil.**" To the psalmist, God's Word was, as Barnes remarked on the word *spoil*, like "Plunder in a camp; prey; booty: —as the hunter or the warrior, when he lights on great and unexpected success" (223). The spoils of war — particularly of ancient warfare — generally produced much wealth and treasure. So, the Psalmist

was enriched with the “plunder” he found in God’s Word, gathering up every jewel of Truth and every golden promise.

The diligent student—one who rejoices at God’s Word—will find an ever-increasing supply of treasure and spoil in his repeated visits to it. It is the testimony of countless students that, regardless of how often one opens its pages, there is still something more to learn and discover. The Bible has that unique trait that is similar to that of the mighty ocean. At its shallows along the beach even children can enjoy and profit from its offerings. However, further out it has depths that only the more mature can appreciate, some of which no human being can fathom. So it is with the Bible: Small children love its simple truths and narratives, but it possesses depth of thought with which the greatest minds have grappled for centuries. There are treasures in the Bible for practically every level of mental and spiritual maturity.

#### *Stanza 22 (Tav)*

Verse 172: **“Let my tongue sing of thy word; For all thy commandments are righteousness.”** The latter half of this verse is a familiar theme that runs through the psalm (e.g., vv. 137, 144, et al.). In the first half of the verse the psalmist declares the worthiness of Jehovah’s Word to receive his praise. This seems a fitting verse with which to conclude a study of some of the excerpted verses from this lengthy psalm, wholly dedicated to exalting the Holy Word of God. Here is no other book worthy of such praise and exaltation. It is worthy of praise because of its source, its righteousness, the certainty of its promises, its inestimable value, its guidance and direction, and its faithfulness.

When we exalt and praise God’s Word, modern antinomians often accuse us of “Bibliolatry”—worship of the Bible. It would, of course be wrong to worship the Bible, and we do not do so. We worship the **God** of the Bible, which no man can do acceptable apart from God’s revelation in the Bible. While we do not **worship** the Bible, let us, like the psalmist, never cease to praise and exalt the Bible for the wonderful, unique Book of God that it is—the only source of His revealed will.

### **Conclusion**

The all-sufficiency of the Word of God for all of man’s spiritual needs could not be more clearly stated or more fully emphasized than it is in this psalm. Through this, the sword of the Holy Spirit, God’s children:

1. Obtain spiritual strength.

2. Are capable of bearing spiritual fruit.
3. Receive wisdom from above.

It is all-sufficient to get us to Heaven, else Paul was badly mistaken in what he said concerning it:

And now I commend you to God, and to the word of his grace, which is able to build you up, and to give you the inheritance among all them that are sanctified (Acts 20:32).

Every scripture inspired of God is also profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for instruction which is in righteousness. That the man of God may be complete, furnished completely unto every good work (2 Tim. 3:16-17).

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