

## Why We Love The Bible – Psalm 119

Last week when we were looking at the relationship between the Law & the Gospel I finished by stating the following: *If you want to know how a born again Christian ought to feel about God's Law read Psalm 119.*

This week I want to highlight that Psalm 119 teaches us how we should view & feel about all of God's word, & what we should do with & what it can do in & for us.

The Law & the Gospel may have different functions, but together (with everything else in Scripture) they become the Holy Spirit's doubled edged sword – the word of God. Ephesians 6:17 calls the word of God the sword of the Spirit. Hebrews 4:12-13 declares; **“For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart. And no creature is hidden from his sight, but all are naked and exposed to the eyes of him to whom we must give account.”** Notice how these verses also highlight how united God is with his word... God works very personally & deeply in human hearts through his word. When the word of God pierces into our lives it is God himself at work. God himself is the surgeon & the word is his instrument. This is why we must always hold & maintain a high view of Scripture as the breathed out & infallible word of God. The Bible is the most prophetic word from God we'll ever get (1 Peter 1:19-21) & it is the only infallible prophetic word we'll ever get... Anything that contradicts it is not him.

The Bible of course is not an end in itself. Its purpose is to bring us face to face with God himself (& with ourselves), to reveal him so we encounter him, know him & are changed by him. We do not worship a Trinity consisting of Father, Son & Holy Bible. We worship the Father, Son & Holy Spirit. Yes, some may forget that, however there are many more that (even using the argument above) undermine & undervalue the Bible.

It can be a fine line, but I think Spurgeon got it right when he said; *“To me the Bible is not God, but it is God's voice, & I do not hear it without awe.”* The Bible is not God but it is God's voice, God's view, God's opinion, God's standard on morality, justice, mercy & righteousness, God's story of creation & redemption. This is why it is so appropriate for the Psalmist & us to speak of the Bible in such affectionate ways. The Bible is what it is because of who God is... It can be trusted as completely faithful & true because God himself is completely faithful & true. It is unchanging because he is unchanging. Scripture is the word of God, a word of absolute authority and sure promise etc because God has spoken it...

We esteem the Bible so highly & love it so much not because it is an end in itself but because it is the breathed out word of God. And it is given to bring us to him & to lead us into all he has for us – it is a lamp to our feet & a light to our path – it is given to awaken & sustain desire to encounter him, to show us how to be saved, how to live, how to know him, how he wants to encounter & bless us. Without it there is no

true objective standard & measure for our faith, morality & knowledge of God. Jen Wilkin writes; *“The goal of Bible study is not to build greater knowledge of the Bible, but to build a greater knowledge of God himself.”*

Psalms 119 is essentially a love poem about the word of God, but it is so obviously written by someone who knew & loved God himself – that is why the Psalmist loved the written word of God so much... Love, trust & esteem of God & his word rise together! We love & trust it because we love & trust him! This is the longest Psalm & the longest chapter in the Bible. And this longest Psalm & longest chapter found in the central pages of our Bible expresses in the most passionate & beautiful way how we should view & feel about all the word of God.

The Psalm is arranged in 22 sections with eight verses in each following all 22 letters of the Hebrew alphabet. The form of following letters was to help people memorise the Psalm. And since this Psalm covers all the letters of the Hebrew alphabet we can almost certainly be sure the Psalmist is communicating that it takes every single letter, & all 176 verses, to fully express the importance, centrality & value of God’s word. There can be no doubt at all about the theme of the Psalm for nearly all 176 verses mention God’s words in some way – commandments, precepts, rules, promises etc.

The Psalmist expresses what God’s word means to him & how it should be viewed, how we should feel about it, what we should do with it & what it can do in & for us. The Psalmist is not living at a time when it’s easy to love God’s word & all his righteous rules. You pick this up as you read through it. Yet he is full of gratitude for God’s word, confidence in God’s word, prayer to understand it more & he is clinging to it no matter what.

There are so many life verses in this Psalm, it will wet our appetite for God’s word like nothing else & it will underscore again & again the immense & eternal value of God’s word. But please don’t be discouraged if it does not reflect your current & constant confidence, feeling & doing of God’s word. Remember this is a love poem, not a checklist. Rather than getting discouraged that our passion often does not mirror the Psalmists, let’s allow his passionate poetry to encourage & rub off on us. I believe these words are full of power to quicken & intensify passion for God’s & his word in our hearts. They have so done so in my heart this week. The Psalmist’s passion has in no way deflated me, no it has only stirred, & is still stirring, & will keep stirring me I’m sure...

Before I read it all let me just point out a few things quickly. *Firstly Psalm 119 shows us how we should view the written word of God – what we should believe about it.* It can be trusted because it is always right & righteous. Verse 142 says; **“Your righteousness is righteous forever, and your law is true.”** Verse 160 says; **“The sum of your word is truth, and every one of your righteous rules endures forever.”** So it is not just truth, it is eternal truth. There is no other truth like it therefore the Psalmist can say **“I trust your word”**

(42), **“All your commandments are sure”** (86), **“Forever, O LORD, your word is firmly fixed in the heavens”** (89), **“I have seen a limit to all perfection, but your commandment is exceedingly broad”** (96), **“Your testimonies are my heritage forever”** (111) & **“But you are near, O LORD, and all your commandments are true. Long have I known from your testimonies that you have founded them forever”** (151-152)!

This is his deep conviction about the written word of God & it should be ours. This is how we should view & what we should believe about the Bible. The greatest defence of the authority of Scripture is found in what Scripture says about itself... Kevin DeYoung writes; *“We go to the Bible to learn about the Bible because to judge the Bible by any other standard would be to make the Bible less than what it claims to be.”* It’s a bit like with Jesus, either he is who he claims to be or he is not. Either the Bible is what it claims to be or it is not. There is no middle ground. 50 years ago J. I. Packer wrote; *“Scripture itself is alone competent to judge our doctrine of Scripture.”* This is a very frustrating argument for a person who does not esteem the Bible, however if we view the word of God like the Psalmist we have no other option. If the Scriptures are the breathed out word of God then there is no other book or standard on its level... they judge everything else that is written, thought & done, they alone are the final authority. All other truth is relative, cultures change their minds about morality etc but the word of God does not shift one inch on any issue because it is firmly fixed in the heavens forever... This is how Christian’s should view the Bible.

*Secondly Psalm 119 shows us how we should feel about the written word of God.* It is so clear that the Psalmist delights, desires & depends on the word of God. He writes; **“For I find delight in your commandments, which I love. I will lift up my hands toward your commandments, which I love”** (47-48), **“your law is my delight”** (77), **“my eyes long for your promise”** (82), **“Oh how I love your law!** (97), **“How sweet are your words to my taste, sweeter than honey to my mouth!** (103), **“for they are the joy of my heart”** (111), **“Therefore I love your commandments above gold, above fine gold”** (127), **“I open my mouth and pant, because I long for your commandments”** (131), **“my heart stands in awe of your words. I rejoice at your word like one who finds great spoil”** (161-162), **“I love your law”** (163), **“Seven times a day I praise you for your righteous rules”** (164)... & we could go on & on.

This is how those who esteem the word of God should feel about the word of God. Such powerful, emotional, poetic passion for the word of God! Again DeYoung writes; *“All that the psalmist believed and felt about the words from God is all that we should feel and believe about the Word of God incarnate. Our desire, delight, and dependence on the words of Scripture do not grow inversely to our desire, delight, and dependence on Jesus Christ. The two must always rise together.”* Jesus said in John 14:23; **“If anyone loves me, he will keep my word, and my Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him”** (cf. Mark 8:38). Love for Jesus & his word go together. The presence of God & the word of God come together...

If the Psalmist felt all this about the words of God he had access to in his day, then how much more should we rejoice in having the complete OT & NT which reveal to us the wonders of the gospel – the wonders of Christ & what he has accomplished & secured for us & the world!

Thirdly what does Psalm 119 teach us to do with the written word of God? We sing the word (172), speak the word (13), study & meditate on the word (97, 148), store up the word (11), obey the word (8, 57, 146), praise God for the word (7, 164) & pray that God would act according to his word...

Fourthly, what does the word do in & for us? These are not exhaustive lists just examples... God's words strengthen us in sorrow (28), comfort us with God's steadfast love (76), lead us into freedom (45), give us understanding (73, 104), make us wise (98), guide us (105), give us hope (114, 147), give us life (144, 154, 156) & bring deliverance & help (170,175).