

## “How Can We Live A Pure Life?”

Psalm 119: 9-16

Introduction: 1) One of my heroes in the gospel ministry is a man named Adrian Rogers (1931-2005). He pastored the historic Bellevue Baptist Church in Memphis from 1972-2005 and was elected president of the SBC three times (1979-1980; 1986-1988). Known as “the prince of preachers,” he lead Southern Baptists to once again affirm without apology the inerrancy, infallibility and sufficiency of the Bible. During what is known as the Conservative Resurgence, Rogers was asked to serve on what became known as the “Peace Committee.” Rogers and the other committee members were charged with reaching a compromise between liberal and conservative Baptists on theological doctrines, especially the doctrine of the Bible’s inspiration. At one point in their meetings, Rogers was approached by a lawyer who represented the moderate or liberal perspective. During this conversation Rogers made a famous statement that in so many ways defined the heart of the controversy. The lawyer pulled Rogers aside and said, ‘Adrian, if you don’t compromise, we will never get together.’” Rogers’ reply was simple and direct: “I’m willing to compromise about many things, but not the Word of God. So far as getting together is concerned, we don’t have to get together. The Southern Baptist Convention, as it is, does not have to survive. I don’t have to be the pastor of Bellevue Baptist Church. I don’t have to be loved; I don’t even have

to live. But I will not compromise the Word of God.” (Joyce Rogers, *Love Worth Finding*, 109-11).

2) Why was Adrian Rogers so passionate about the Bible, so unwilling to compromise on the Word of God? I am sure there are many reasons, but one I am certain of is found in Psalm 119:11, “I have treasured your word in my heart so that I may not sin against you.” Rogers knew what the evangelist D.L. Moody knew, “This book will keep you from sin, or sin will keep you from this book.”

3) Psalm 119:9-16 is the 2<sup>nd</sup> stanza of this acrostic or alphabet psalm patterned after the 22 letters of the Hebrew alphabet. Since “Bet” is the second letter, each line in this stanza starts with a word that begins with Hebrew letter “Bet.” The stanza also begins with a perennial question that has become especially relevant in our current American context, “How can a young man [and for that matter an old man!] keep his way pure?” With the issues of sexual assault, abuse, and harassment dominating the media and the culture, what can the man of God, the devoted follower of Jesus Christ, do to live a life of unquestionable moral purity? Psalm 119 makes it clear that the key is our relationship to the Word of God. In stanza “Bet,” 9 admonitions concerning our relationship to Scripture are highlighted for our careful reflection and meditation. They provide a divinely inspired roadmap to a pure and holy life.

I. Guard the Word of God in your life

119:9

- Verse 9 begins with a rhetorical question every man, especially the young, struggles with: How can I live a pure and holy life that is pleasing to my Lord? Verses 9-16 provide the answer. The first line of attack is a defensive one, “by guarding it [his way] according to your word.” We guard or protect the word of God in our life. As a result, the word of God performs guard duty and acts as a sentinel in keeping us free from sin. We keep the word in a safe place in our life, and the word protects us and keeps us safe from impurity both in thought and action. As I guard my life by the Word of God, the Word of God guards me.
- In John 17:17 Jesus prayed this prayer for us, “Sanctify them in the truth; your word is truth.” He then adds in verse 19, “I sanctify myself for them, so that they also may be sanctified.” Jesus guarded, He kept the word in a safe place in his life as He made “his way” to the cross. “Blameless” (Psalm 119:1) and with an “upright heart” (Psalm 119:7), the pure, spotless, sinless Son of God guarded the Word as it guided Him to Calvary. He sets a perfect example for us to follow.

II. Seek the Lord with all your heart

119:10

- Verses 10-11 are probably the most crucial to living a life of holiness and purity because they focus on the heart, the inner man, the real you on the

inside. Because we guard our way by the word in verse 9, we are moved to seek the giver of the word in verse 10. And, our seeking is not half-hearted!

“With my whole heart” (*ESV*), “with all my heart” (*CSB*), “I seek you.”

This is how I guard my way by your word in my life. With diligence, passion and sincerity I seek my Lord! I seek you, I want you, I need you.

- Then suddenly, the psalmist makes a short prayer of petition, “don’t let me wander from your commands.” There is much wisdom in this request.

Proverbs 19:27 reminds us, “If you stop listening to correction, my son, you will stray from the words of knowledge.” The psalmist knew that it is easier to make a promise to God than to keep it. I will seek the Lord with my whole heart, but I recognize that I need His help to succeed! Spurgeon puts it so well, “The man of God exerts himself, but does not trust himself...he knows that even his whole strength is not enough to keep him right unless his King shall be his keeper, and he who made the commands shall make him constant in obeying them...” (*The Treasure of David*, vol. 3, 158). It is hard to wander from the Lord’s commands when you seek him with your whole heart. (Ex. Marriage).

### III. Treasure the Word of God in your heart

119:11

- Verse 11 is one of the most well known in all of the Bible. Many of us probably memorized it as a child in VBS. The *KJV* is still the most familiar,

“Thy word have I hid in mine heart, that I might not sin against thee.”

However, the *CSB* probably captures the original intent of the psalmist a bit better, “I have treasured your word in my heart so that I may not sin against you.” (emp. mine). The idea is that Word of God “is so valuable it will be preserved in the heart (that is, the mind) for any appropriate use...the word will be continually at his disposal to determine his actions” (Ross, *Psalms*, vol. 3, 477). John Piper provides additional insight and help in his thoughts on the importance of the heart. He writes, “take the phrase “in my heart.” The point here is mainly to say: inside of me, not just on a tablet outside of me. The words of God are not just kept in writing for the psalmist to consult outside of himself. They are kept for his consulting inside of him – in his heart. The heart of the Old Testament is a place of both thinking and feeling (Genesis 6:5; Job 36:13). So these words of God are being treasured in a place where they can be thought about and felt.” (“The Word I Have Treasured in My Heart,” 1-5-97).

- We would be negligent in applying this verse if we did not at least note the value of scripture memorization. Dallas Willard provides a wise perspective when he writes, “As a pastor, teacher, and counselor I have repeatedly seen the transformation of inner and outer life that comes simply from memorization and meditation upon Scripture. Personally, I would never

undertake to pastor a church or guide a program of Christian education that did not involve a continuous program of memorization of the choicest passages of Scripture for people of all ages.” (*The Spirit of the Disciplines* (SF: Harper & Row, 1988, 150).

- The psalmist knew that the key to a pure life is a pure heart made clean by the Word of God. Paul knew this too and provides words of wisdom to his young son in the ministry. Indeed, 2 Timothy 2:22 is a beautiful complement to verse 11, “Flee from youthful passions, and pursue righteousness, faith, love and peace, along with those who call on the Lord from a pure heart.” A pure heart will equal a pure life.

#### IV. Let the Lord teach you His statutes

119:12

- Verse 12 is a simple prayer of two parts. First there is praise, then there is petition. The praise: “Blessed are you, O Lord” (*Yahweh*). I praise you, adore you, and thank you for your Word. In that light, “teach me your statutes.” Help me to be faithful and “loyal to the terms of the covenant” between you and your people” (Van Gemeren, *Psalms*, EBC vol. 5, 859.).
- Van Gemeren points out that, “The teachable spirit begins with proper regard for God” (Ibid). I praise you my Lord. Now, teach your servant more of your word, your law, your commandments.

- Verse 12 is nothing less than an Old Testament call to discipleship. It finds a New Testament echo in the Great Commission of Matthew 28:19-20.

Making disciples of all nations means that we teach them everything that the risen Lord Jesus has commanded. No exceptions. No shortcuts. All of his statutes for all of his people.

- The Bible clearly commends godly and gifted teachers for our benefit and edification. However, verse 12 reminds us there is a better teacher still!

V. Proclaim the Lord's wisdom with your words 119:13

- In verse 12 we have been taught the Word. Now in verse 13 we “declare” (*ESV*) and “proclaim” (*CSB*) the word! For all of my life I will verbally “recite aloud” (*NLT*) all that I hear (“Your judgments”) from your mouth. From your mouth to my mouth the Word of God will be declared throughout my life. I will neglect none of it. I will proclaim it “all.”
- Take note that the judgements, the rules, the regulations we declare, are words that come from the mouth of God (an anthropomorphism). Could Paul have had this phrase in mind when he wrote in 2 Timothy 3:16, “All Scripture is God breathed?” Here the doctrine of the Bible’s inspiration is lifted to the highest level. The logic is quite clear. A perfect God will only speak perfect words. Thus Thomas Manton (1620-1677), the English Puritan and chaplain to Oliver Cromwell, well says, “That which should be

declared and taught in the church should not be our own opinions and fancies, but the pure word of God; not the vanity of our thoughts, but the verity of his revelations...” (*Psalm 119*, vol. 1, 109).

## VI. Rejoice in the Lord’s decrees

119:14

- Verse 14 rings with the sound of celebration as the psalmist reflects on the value of God’s word. It recalls Psalm 1:2 and anticipates what we will find later in this psalm.
  - Psalm 119:72, “Instruction from your lips is better for me than thousands of gold and silver pieces.”
  - Psalm 119:127, “Therefore, I love your commands above gold, above fine gold.” (*ESV*).
- The one who allows the Lord to be his teacher (v. 12) “rejoices” (*ESV*, “delights”) in the revelation of God’s decrees (*ESV*, “testimonies”). How much does he rejoice? He declares, “as much as in all riches.” In other words I cannot put a price tag on how valuable God’s word is to me! Collect all the riches in the world and they pale in comparison. I would not trade God’s word for anything this world has to offer. My treasure is God not gold, it is his eternal word not temporal wealth.



- A man will treasure what he delights in (v. 11). A man will also proclaim and speak of that which he delights (v. 13). For the psalmist it is the Lord (v. 10) and His word (v. 14). What is it for you and me?

## VII. Meditate on the Lord's precepts

119:15

- Verse 15 draws attention to the spiritual discipline of meditation and again recalls Psalm 1:2 where we read that the righteous meditate on God's word "day and night." The psalmist declares that he will :1) "meditate" on the Lord "precepts" and that he will 2) "think" (*ESV*, "fix my eyes,") "on your ways." There is an important connection to verse 9 and the way of the psalmist. If believers, followers of Jesus, meditate and think on God's ways then his ways will become their ways. And, since his way is pure their way will be pure!
- Meditating on God's word is a lost art in our day that we desperately need to recover. Ross points out that meditation has the idea of "a thoughtful concentration on God's word," but it is not limited to that. He notes it may also include "musing, talking, or even singing to oneself" God's word (Ross, 479). I love Spurgeon's thoughts on this: "He who has an inward delight in anything will not long withdraw his mind from it. As a miser often returns to look upon his treasure, so does the devout believer by frequent meditation turn over the priceless wealth which he has discovered in the book of the

Lord. To some men meditation is a task; to the man of cleansed way it is a joy.” (Spurgeon, 161).

#### VIII. Delight in the Lord’s statutes

119:16

- In verse 12 we pray, asking the Lord to “teach” us his statutes. Now in verse 16, we declare, “I will delight in your statutes.” What we ask we receive. God teaches us. And, what we receive we delight in! We delight in his word, here called his “statutes.”
- James Boice says the word “delight” in verse 16 carries the idea of “a settled pleasure” (*Psalms*, vol. 3, 981). Delight has followed meditation which followed treasuring God’s word more than all riches. God’s word to me is a blessing not a burden. It is my drink, my food, my life. It is my happiness and my joy. Adam Clarke said of his delight in God’s word, “I will skip about and jump for joy (quoted in Spurgeon, 170).

#### IX. Do not forget the Word of God

119:16

Because God’s word is my delight, “I will not forget” it. Afterall, “Love for God’s word is love for God” (Van Gemeren, 863). So, to honor and fulfill this pledge, what will be my daily, practical application of this text? Seven quick ideas.

- 1) I will carry my Bible with me (an easy thing to do with Bible apps).

- 2) I will read my Bible.
- 3) I will study my Bible.
- 4) I will meditate on my Bible.
- 5) I will love my Bible.
- 6) I will share my Bible.
- 7) I will thank God for my Bible.

Ross sums it up so very well, “This “*Bet Stanza*” has to do with keeping our lives pure by avoiding sin, which is done by knowing the word of God so well that it is always on our minds to correct and to guide us through life. But this is no fixed duty; for the believer the word is like a treasure, more delightful and useful than riches. The Lord is the teacher, his word and his way the lesson, and righteousness the result.” (Ross, 480).

Conclusion: You will find these words printed inside many of the Testaments distributed by the wonderful Christian organization known as the Gideons. You will also find a version of it in my Hermeneutics and Bible Exposition class notes. Though they are not inspired like the Bible, they are inspiring as they beautifully capture the treasure that dwells in us when we allow the Word of God to make itself at home in our hearts.

“The Bible contains the mind of God, the state of man, the way of salvation, the doom of sinners, and the happiness of believers. Its doctrines are holy, its precepts are binding, its histories are true, and its decisions are immutable.

Read it to be wise, believe it to be safe, and practice it to be holy. It contains light to direct you, food to support you, and comfort to cheer you.

It is the traveler’s map, the pilgrim’s staff, the pilot’s compass, the soldier’s sword and the Christian’s charter. Here too, Heaven is opened and the gates of Hell disclosed.

Christ is its grand subject, our good its design, and the glory of God its end. It should fill the memory, rule the heart and guide the feet. Read it slowly, frequently and prayerfully. It is a mine of wealth, a paradise of glory, and a river of pleasure.

It is given you in life, will be opened at the judgment, and be remembered forever. It involves the highest responsibility, rewards the greatest labor, and will condemn all who trifle with its sacred contents. It is the Word of God. Treasured it in your heart that you might not sin against your God.” (Slightly adapted, author unknown).