

The Power and Perfection of the Word of God

Psalm 119:89-96

Introduction: 1) In 1978 in the city of Chicago, the International Council on Biblical Inerrancy (ICBI) came together to draft a statement concerning the Bible's inerrancy and infallibility. The statement is comprised of 19 articles of affirmation and denial and is preceded by a "short statement" of 5 propositions. The short statement reads as follows:

A Short Statement

1. God, who is Himself Truth and speaks truth only, has inspired Holy Scripture in order thereby to reveal Himself to lost mankind through Jesus Christ as Creator and Lord, Redeemer and Judge. Holy Scripture is God's witness to Himself.
2. Holy Scripture, being God's own Word, written by men prepared and superintended by His Spirit, is of infallible divine authority in all matters upon which it touches: it is to be believed, as God's instruction, in all that it affirms; obeyed, as God's command, in all that it requires; embraced, as God's pledge, in all that it promises.
3. The Holy Spirit, Scripture's Divine Author, both authenticates it to us by His inward witness and opens our minds to understand its meaning.

4. Being wholly and verbally God-given, Scripture is without error or fault in all its teaching, no less in what it states about God's acts in creation, about the events of world history, and about its own literary origins under God, than in its witness to God's saving grace in individual lives.
5. The authority of Scripture is inescapably impaired if this total divine inerrancy is in any way limited or disregarded, or made relative to a view of truth contrary to the Bible's own; and such lapses bring serious loss to both the individual and the Church.

2) These statements find biblical warrant throughout the Bible. They have the support of Jesus (Matt 5:17-18; John 10:35; 17:17), Paul (2 Tim 3:16) and Peter (2 Pet 1:20-21). They also have the support of the songwriter of Psalm 119 who repeatedly speaks of Scripture as that which comes from the "mouth" of God (vv. 13, 72, 88), and that which is "forever firmly fixed in the heavens" (v. 89) and "without limit" (v. 96, *CSB*).

3) Psalm 119 is the Word of God song from verse 1 to verse 176. However, in stanza *Lamedh* it soars to new heights in its praise of the divine Word. This word is eternal and it knows no bounds or limits. The Word's authority is settled in heaven. Therefore its authority should be settled on earth as well! Three overarching themes guide our study of these 8 verses.

I. God's Word is powerful and perfect because it is eternal 119:89-91

- Isaiah 40:8 teaches us, “The grass withers, the flower fades, but the word of our God will stand forever.” In the first 3 verses of stanza *Lamedh*, the psalmist begins with a strong affirmation of the eternal and abiding nature of the Word of God. This is simply a reflection of the nature and character of our God, something we also see in creation. There is a permanence to the acts of our God. We serve a God who can be relied upon today, forever, and throughout all generations.

1) The word is sure 119:89

The great Reformer Martin Luther said of Holy Scripture, “The Bible is alive, it speaks to me; it has feet, it runs after me; it has hands, it lays hold of me. The Bible is not antique or modern. It is eternal” (quoted in Boice, *Living by the Book*, 80). Luther’s works echo verse 89 where the song writer declares, “Forever O LORD (*Yahweh*), your Word is firmly fixed in the heavens.” There is an eternal quality to the Word of God and one that will never change. It “is firmly fixed in the heavens.” It is sure and settled in its eternal and abiding nature. To put it in popular parlance, the Word of God is here to stay and it isn’t going anywhere! It is firm, fixed and forever! Its abiding nature could not be more sure and certain. We can rely on it today, tomorrow and forever.

2) God is faithful

119:90

- The psalmist connects the “forever” nature of God’s Word to his “faithfulness” that “endures to all generation,” (lit. “to generation and generation”). He then makes a further connection to creation, something God brought into existence out of nothing by his Word (Gen. 1). Ross puts it well, ““You have established the earth, and it stands fast.” God’s work is dependable, because God is dependable; and the permanence of the earth, which he created, is an emblem and guarantee of his faithfulness.” (Ross, 540-41).
- The rhyme and reason of creation is a reflection of God’s faithfulness, a faithfulness that is as sure tomorrow as it is today. By His Word God created all things, and by his Word He sustains all things. Colossians 1:16-17 provides a fitting commentary on this verse, “For everything was created by him, in heaven and on earth, the visible and the invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities— all things have been created through him and for him. He is before all things, and by him all things hold together.”

3) Creation is the Lord’s Servant

119:91

Verse 91 reinforces the truth of verse 90, but then adds to it. The phrase “By your appointment they (the heavens and the earth) stand this day is

parallel to “you have established (created) the earth, and it stands fast.” Your creation O Lord is fixed and permanent. But then the psalmist adds, “for all things are your servants.” What a beautiful picture this provides. All of Creation is “standing by to do the will of the sovereign, as attendants might present themselves before their King (Gen. 43:15) with the sense of becoming servants to a lord (1 Sam. 16:22). . . All of creation exists because of obedience to God’s Word; all of creation, therefore, exists to do his will” (Ross, 541).

- Spurgeon sums up the matter well, “Both great things and small pay homage to the Lord. No atom escapes his rule, no world avoids his government” (*TOD*, 316).

II. God’s Word is powerful and perfect because it gives life 119:92-95

Afflictions, opposition, pain, persecution and suffering are often the experiences of God’s children. They are things we can all expect, things that should not surprise us. This biblical truth exposes the damnable lie of what is called “the prosperity gospel,” a gospel that is no gospel at all. With its promise of health and wealth to all who have the faith to claim it, it provides an unrealistic and untrue portrait of the Christian life. This was not the experience of Paul, Peter, James and John. It was not the experience of the

Lord Jesus either. When hard times come, and they will, what must guide us in our response?

1) God's word should be our delight

119:92

God's word brought a smile to the face and a song to the heart of the psalmist. It is his "delight" (*CEV*, "happiness"), something he meditated on, memorized and sung. Had God's word not held this precious place in his heart, he had not doubt "I would have perished in my affliction" (cf. vv. 67, 71, 75). The *CEV* renders it, "I would have died in misery."

When people tried "to destroy me" (v. 94), I found delight in your word. In my pain and suffering, your word brought me joy! I love your law. It kept me going.

2) God's word should never be forgotten

119:93

In a bold declaration of loyalty, flowing out of a heart of gratitude for the Word of God, the psalmist proclaims, "I will never forget your precepts." When I am hurting and in trouble, I will remember and recall your Word. I will think on it and obey it is the idea. And why go to the word when such occasions arise? The answer is clear: for by them you have given me life. By your word my life was preserved and revived. You renewed and reinvigorated my life by your powerful and perfect word. The life giving power of God's word is a reoccurring theme in this psalm (vv. 25,

37, 40, 50, 88, 107, 149, 154, 156, 159). It should be a reoccurring theme in our lives as well.

3) God's word saves us 119:94

This psalmist affirms his devotion to the Lord, "I am yours." This provides the basis or grounds for his short, simple prayer: "save me." Because I am yours and you are my mind (cf. v. 57), I can cry out with confidence for your deliverance, your rescue. In context it is clear that he needs to be saved from the wicked of the next verse. The songwriter knows only God can save him and so he wisely goes to the right person. It is the fool who looks for salvation and deliverance from others when only God can make it happen.

4) God's word sustains us 119:95

Verse 95 reveals the source of his affliction in verse 92. It is "the wicked" who "lie in wait to destroy me." Verse 92 informed us they came very close to being successful. However, they were no match for the Word, here described as God's testimonies. Spurgeon paints a beautiful picture of what verse 95 is telling us:

"[The wicked] were like wild beasts crouching by the way,
or highwaymen waylaying a defenceless traveler; but the
Psalmist went on his way without considering them, for

he was considering something better, namely, the witness or testimony which God has borne to the sons of men. He did not allow the malice of the wicked to take him off from his holy study of the divine word. He was so calm that he could “consider”; so holy that he loved to consider the Lord’s “testimonies”; so victorious over all their plots that he did not allow them to drive him from his pious contemplations. If the enemy cannot cause us to withdraw our thoughts from holy study, or our feet from holy walking, or our hearts from holy aspirations, he has met with poor success in his assaults” (*TOD*, 317).

III. God’s Word is powerful and perfect because it has no limits 119:96

Verse 96 concludes Lamedh and provides a nice summary of the stanza. Old Testament scholar Derek Kidner says, “This verse could well be a summary of Ecclesiastes, where every earthly enterprise has its day and comes to nothing, and where only God and His commandments do we get beyond these frustrating limits (*Psalms 73-150*, *TOTC*, 426-427). Two main thoughts make up this final verse.

1) God's good creation still has its limitation

All the perfections of God's good world have their limit and come to an inevitable end. Empirical observation and consideration ("I have seen") makes this self-evident. In context the word "perfection" carries the idea of completion, "finished—and finished means finite, and therefore not at all perfect as an infinite God is perfect!" (Wilcock, *The Message of Psalms 73-150*, BST, 207). Creation, in a very real sense, has a relative perfection being the product of an absolutely perfect God. Contra the pantheistic world view, there is a major and clear distinction between God and what God has made.

2) God's good Word goes beyond perfection

The Message paraphrases verse 96, "I see the limits to everything human, but the horizons can't contain your commands." This is a helpful rendering of the verse. The concluding phrase of this verse stands in contrast to the beginning one. Creation is marked by a limited and relative perfection. God's commands are marked by an unlimited and absolute perfection. They are forever and eternal. They go beyond any perfection this world and life may offer. To pick up on the image of Matthew 7:24-27, the perfections of the world are but shifting sand, but the beyond perfection of the Word of God is a solid rock that will endure forever. So,

where are you standing today? Tomorrow? For all eternity? The choice is yours. The wise choice is easy to see.

Conclusion

This stanza affirms the preexistence and eternal nature of God's Word. Before it was written down in time, space, and history, it already was. The New Testament affirms the same truth, but does it a bit differently. It does it in light of the incarnation of the Word, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. . . .And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us" (John 1:1, 14). The written Word and the living Word both stand forever. Both are eternal. They existed before time began and they will continue when time is no more. What marvelous gifts from God are His twin Words!