

Our Righteous God and His Righteous Word

Psalm 119:137-144

Introduction: 1) When Christians study the doctrine of God, one of the important categories we investigate is His attributes. As Timothy George well says, “When theologians ask, ‘What is God like?’ they talk about the divine attributes. God’s attributes are also referred to as his perfections, properties, virtues, and predicates. The attributes characterize God’s nature and character” (*Theology for the Church*, rev. ed., 190). George goes on to note, “The attributes of God are too numerous to list; but they include infinity, incomprehensibility, immutability, omnipresence, omniscience, omnipotence, simplicity, eternity, spirituality, holiness, truth, wisdom, goodness, love, righteousness, unity, immensity, fidelity, mercy, self-sufficiency, indivisibility, immeasurability, personality, congruence, glory, blessedness, and freedom” (Ibid).

2) Stanza “Tsadhe” (vs. 137-144) zeros in on one of the divine attributes: “righteousness.” Some form of the word occurs 6 times in these 8 verses. This is not surprising since each verse begins with the letter “tsadhe” and the Hebrew word for “righteous” is *tsedeq*. Wayne Grudem provides a helpful and simple definition of righteousness when he writes, “God’s righteousness means that God always acts in accordance with what is right and is himself the final standard of what is right” (*Systematic Theology*, 203). The psalmist will look at this wonderful

attribute of our God in three movements (vs. 137-138, 139-141, 142-144).

Attention is clearly devoted to our righteous God and His righteous Word. This stanza takes the form of a confession. There is only one prayer request and it comes at the very end in verse 144. It is good that we would make the psalmist's confession and prayer our own.

I. I believe our righteous God's word is righteous and faithful

119:137-138

Righteousness is not a popular idea in the 21st century in Western Culture. And, because it is not a popular idea, most persons have little to no understanding of what it is. The fact is we are limited in terms of resources when it comes to understanding what true righteousness is. James Boice is exactly correct when he writes, "anyone who cares about righteousness and wants to act righteously should study the Bible" (*Living by the Book*, 134). Psalm 119:137-144 is an excellent place to start.

1) He is righteous in who He is 119:137

The psalmist begins this stanza with as straightforward affirmation about our God, "You are righteous, LORD" (*Yahweh*). Your very character and nature is characterized by righteousness; what is right. The apostle Paul tells us the "righteousness of God is revealed" in the gospel (Rom. 1:16-17). The apostle John adds that when we sin, "We have an advocate with the Father – Jesus Christ the righteous one" (1 John 2:1) Righteousness is

an essential attribute of our great God. Moses writes of God in Deuteronomy 32:4, “all his ways are just. A faithful God, without bias, he is righteous and true.”

Our God is the standard of righteousness. No correct understanding of righteousness can be discovered outside of Him or apart from him. This is vitally important. The LORD alone is righteous. He is the final standard. He is the only standard. If you want to know what righteousness is then get to know the one true and living God. And, if you want to see perfect righteousness in action, then just look at Jesus!

2) He is righteous in what He says 119:137-138

Because the Christian God is righteous in who He is, He is also righteous in what He reveals in his Word. There are no lies. There is no deception. “The decrees you issue are righteous” (v. 137). The *ESV* says, “right are your rules.” Verse 138 reinforces this truth saying, “The decrees you issue are righteous and altogether trustworthy.” Righteousness and faithfulness characterize the Word of God. God’s righteous revelation is the natural expression of his absolute and perfect righteousness. God’s Word is altogether true and trustworthy because He inspired it (2 Tim. 3:16). Therefore to doubt and question the righteous nature of God’s

Word is to question the righteous nature of God Himself. The two are intimately intertwined and cannot be separated.

II. I believe our righteous God's Word is to be obeyed 119:139-141

Our righteous God did not give us his righteous and trustworthy Word for our mere contemplation and reflection, as important as both of these are. He gave us His Word for our passionate pursuit and obedience. Concerning God's Word, Spurgeon said, "It is not left to our choice whether we will accept them or no; they are issued by royal command, and are not to be questioned" (*TOD*, vol. 3, 390). And, that which is not to be questioned is to be obeyed without question. The psalmist develops the idea of obedience in three very helpful ways.

1) Be passionate for God's Word 119:139

The psalmist testifies to his passion for God's Word with a negative example "My anger (*ESV, NIV, NASV*, "zeal") overwhelms me because my foes forget your words." Zeal speaks of a "passionate intensity over things that matter...Here it is zeal to defend God's Word because the enemies have forgotten it, meaning they have not paid attention to its revelation or regulations" (Ross, *A Commentary of the Psalms*, vol 3, 572). The psalmist experiences tremendous grief, anguish of soul, over the reality that those who oppose him care nothing for God's Word. It

does not matter to them. But, the idea of simply being a passive observer for the psalmist is not an option.

- It troubles him that people disregard God’s Word and take the lives of the unborn.
- It troubles him that people disregard God’s Word and practice bigotry and racism.
- It troubles him that people disregard God’s Word and neglect the poor.
- It troubles him that people disregard God’s Word and neglect the immigrant.
- It troubles him that people disregard God’s Word and make light of and even mock the Lord Jesus, the Savior of the world.

He is passionate about these things. We should be passionate for them as well.

2) Love God’s Word

119:140

The trustworthiness of God’s Word, his “promises”, is something the psalmist knows well from experience. They can be described as “well tried” (*ESV*), “completely pure” (*CSB*). God’s Word has been discovered “to be pure, like gold that has been refined” (Ross, 573). Therefore his response makes perfect sense: “your servant loves it.” The servant of the

Lord loves the Word of God and the God of the Word. His heart and soul are joined to the Word of God like two lovers! And, because he loves the Word, he is passionate for it (v. 139), he will not forget it (v. 141), it is his delight (v. 143) and he will live by it (v. 144). Jesus said it well in Matthew 4:4, “man must not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.” Scripture is my life. Scripture is my love.

3) Faithfully recall God’s Word 119:141

In the eyes of the world, the one who loves and lives by the Word of God is a fool. Thus the songwriter says “I am insignificant and despised,” I am “lowly and despised” (*NIV*). Because I love you and your word with all my heart my enemies mock me and make fun of me. Still, “I do not forget your precepts.” I remain faithful to your Word and true to you no matter what. I love you and your Word more than the opinion of man. Paul says it so very well in Galatians 1:10, “Am I striving to please people? If I were still trying to please people, I would not be a servant of Christ.”

When I am ridiculed by this world, I will faithfully recall your Word. I will obey it. I will not forget it.

III. I believe our righteous God’s Word will endure forever 119:142-144

Things in this broken and fallen world don’t last. Things wear out. Things break and cannot be repaired. We all grow old and die, becoming in this

world nothing more than a memory. Thankfully there is something that will never wear out, become obsolete, and fade away. It is the righteous character of our eternal God and his righteous Word. The prophet Isaiah got it exactly right, “The grass withers, the flowers fade, but the [righteous] word of our [righteous] God remains forever.”

1) Believe God’s Word is righteous and true 119:142

Once again the psalmist makes a strong declaration and confession, “Your righteousness is an everlasting righteousness.” God does not change. Therefore His righteous character will never change, it will last forever. It will remain an “everlasting righteousness.” And, because God is everlastingly and eternally righteous, “His instruction (*ESV*, “law”) is true.” This is such an important and encouraging truth. Politicians lie. CEO’s lie. Employees lie. Spouses lie. Parents lie. Children lie. Even Christians lie. But, our God never, ever lies. NEVER! He is righteous and His Word is righteous. He is true and His Word is true! Concerning the Word of God, Spurgeon is spot on: “We may not say of them that they contain the truth, but that they are the truth (*TOD*, vol 3, 391).

2) Delight in God’s Word at all times 119:143

The activity of the foes of verse 139 are now spelled out in verse 143. They inflict on the psalmist “trouble and distress.” His troubles have

brought him emotional distress and “anguish” (*ESV*). They have “overtaken him” (*CSB*), “found him out” (*ESV*). Like hounds after its prey, they have tracked him down and caught up with him. He is discouraged and almost overwhelmed by their relentless attacks. But God has rescued him by His Word. Getting his focus off his enemies, he has fled to the Word of God which is his “delight.” Brought low by his oppressors (vs 121,134), he is lifted up and given renewed vigor (v. 144) by the commandments of the Lord. Delighting in the Word of God no matter what may come his way, he is strengthened and empowered to press on and stay in the fight.

3) Find life in God’s Word through prayer 119:144

This is the only prayer in stanza Tsadhe and it is a prayer for understanding. It is preceded by a second declaration that the Lord and his “decrees (*ESV*, “testimonies”) are righteous forever” (also v. 142). God is righteous forever and His Word is righteous forever. The psalmist longs to understand the righteous Word of his righteous God to the end: “that I may live” (*ESV*). *The Message* paraphrases verse 144 very well, “The way you tell me to live is always right; help me understand it so I can live life to the fullest.”

Conclusion

“Life’s adversities should drive us all the more to our Bibles” (Alec Motyer, *Psalms by the Day*, 357). That is certainly true for the Christian. It was certainly true of the Lord Jesus. When confronted and tempted by Satan in the wilderness, He each and every time went to the righteous Word of His righteous Father and defeated His foe (Matt. 4:1-11). Zeal for the Word of God consumed our Savior (v. 139). Despised and treated as nothing by this world, he did not forget the words of Holy Scripture (v. 141). Trouble and anguish” dogged Him all the way to Golgotha, but He continually delighted in the commands of the Bible (v. 143). He knew His Father’s Word was both righteous and faithful (v. 138), and that life, eternal life, was on the other side of the cross and the empty tomb! This is how our Lord lived. This is how those of us who follow Him should live as well. Delight in His Word. There is life, abundant life, for all who do.