

Psalm 119



A Series Essays
On the Octaves and
Individual Verses of the Psalm



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Matthew and the Angel
By Rembrandt van Rijn



(Rembrandt van Rijn)

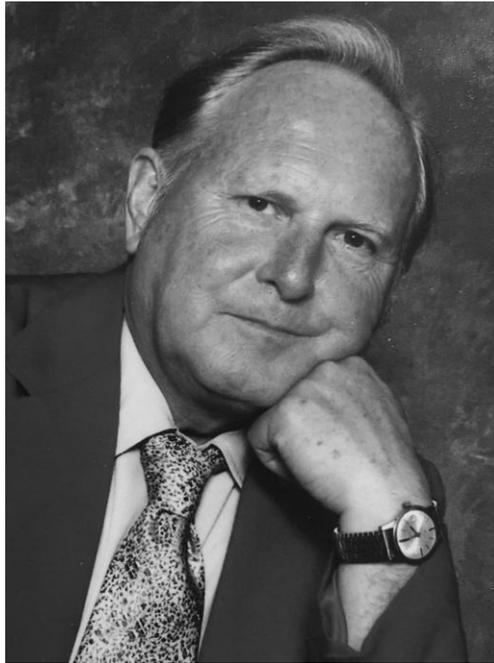


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In Memorium



Leslie S. Rainey - Missionary, Teacher, Author
(1914 – 2012)

From my earliest childhood I remember hearing of “Uncle Les” as he was affectionately called. He served as a missionary to Bermuda, Israel, and finally Africa. His ministry was as a teacher of the Bible and as an author of several excellent books that are still in print. While we were on honeymoon in Bermuda, some friends on the island asked my wife and I if we would like to meet “Uncle Les” and his wife Grace who were visiting there. It was our first meeting with the man that I had heard so much of. During our conversation, Les remarked sadly that many of the people who used to correspond with him had died and no one felt the necessity of filling in their dwindling numbers. Later that night, we decided that we would begin a correspondence with the man that others had forgotten. Correspondence led to support and support led to visits to our home. Visits led to a deep friendship with a man, thirty years my senior, that I came to greatly admire not just as a prolific servant of the Lord, but as a dear Christian brother and friend. During one of those visits, we discussed Psalm 119. Not sure how to approach the psalm, I asked if Les had any insight. “The key lies in the letters,” he told me. “They each have a meaning that helps us understand the particular section that they head.” When I asked if he had any reference that he could send me, he told me the sad tale of his work on the psalm. He had written an extensive commentary on it, but had left the finished manuscript on the front seat of his car in Africa. Someone, seeing it, broke the window and stole the only manuscript he had. All his many hours of work were lost, never to be recovered. He never rewrote the work. Throughout the several years that I have been working on these essays, I have often thought of Les and that sad story. It seemed appropriate, therefore, to dedicate this text to his memory. We will never know what he discovered as he meditated on Psalm 119, but if his other books are any indication, it must have been a wonderful and insightful work. In any case, it is my hope, as you read the essays on the various octaves and verses of Psalm 119, that you will receive somewhat of the blessing that Uncle Les labored so hard to bestow, but was denied by a cruel act of selfishness.

Introduction & Author's Note

Psalm 119 is both the longest psalm and the longest chapter in the Bible. It is a highly structured psalm with 22 – octaves of verses. Each set of eight verses begin with a different letter of the Hebrew alphabet in the order in which those letters normally occur. It is an alphabetic psalm. It is also an introduction to a specific vocabulary. The psalm describes the word of God by introducing seven different terms in the first octave: (God's law, testimonies, ways, precepts, statutes, commandments, and judgments) and an eighth term that summarizes all the other terms in the second octave (God's word). One or another of these terms is used in almost every verse of this psalm. Their meanings are described in the section: "Vocabulary as a Frame of Reference" below. In addition, the psalmist touches briefly on several other things having to do with God's relationship with His covenant people: (thy wondrous works – verse 27, thy mercy – verses 64 and 124, thy merciful kindness – verse 76, thy tender mercies – verses 77 and 156, thy loving kindness – verse 88, thy faithfulness – verse 90, thy salvation – verses 123, 155, 166, and 174 and thy righteousness – verse 123).

The clear intent of this psalm is didactic, but at what level? Clearly it is helpful for small children who need to learn their א-ב - aleph-beth (or alphabet) but are they the only ones who profit from it? The experience of many believers who hold selected verses of this psalm among their favorite life verses would answer no. Throughout the psalm, the psalmist struggles with the development of his relationship with God through His revealed word. There is also a nascent invitation for the reader to identify with the psalmist in his struggle to enter more fully into a harmonious relationship with the God who loves him and Whom he loves in return. Having observed these things, how then shall we to proceed?

First, we will look at the nature of Hebrew Poetry in general.

Second, we will look at the significance of the alphabetic headings of the individual octaves as "lenses" through which we will be able to view that particular octave in a distinct way.

Third: We will look at the vocabulary that the psalmist uses in order to understand why different words are used throughout this psalm.

Fourth: We will look at structure and inter-octave connectivity.

The main body of this work provides an overview of each of the twenty-two octaves followed by individual essays on selected verses in the particular octave. The overview section of each octave should provide the reader with some guidance as they begin the process of reading the octave for themselves and entering into its significance to the extent of their ability and desire. Each essay that follows a particular section are intended to provide a starting point for individual reflection on the particular verse and its bearing not only on the wider psalm but also on the nature of the spiritual life, in general. The notes conclude with an appendix on usage that lists of the occurrences of the vocabulary throughout the psalm so that the reader may more easily consider widely separated references linked by the same word. There is also a word frequency table that allows the reader to see which of the Hebrew words occur in each octave.

N.B.

This text was written over approximately a 2 ½ year period. The overviews of each octave were written, rewritten, and finally revised. In conjunction with that, the articles on each verse were written to capture and expand what had been said in the overview as well as introduce new ways of looking at the individual verse(s). All the writing was accompanied by urgent prayer and intense meditation. The intent of every article was at least fourfold: to be exegetically sound; positionally harmonious with the wider

context of the Bible (i.e. an essay on a particular theme(s) that the verse(s) in hand raised in my mind); devotional; and evangelical. They were to be devotional in the sense that I did not intend the article solely to inform the reader's mind with facts about God and the spiritual life, but to enflame the believer's heart with love for the God with Whom the psalmist so desperately longed to have blessed fellowship. They were to be evangelical in the sense that each article sought to discover the way in which every octave and its verses looked forward to the Lord Jesus Christ and the Gospel. In this I was not disappointed. I found that there are 22 wonderful portraits of the Christ of God in this psalm. To miss them is to misunderstand the psalm entirely.

When finally assembled for proofreading, I noticed what appeared to be two fatal flaws in the work: density of thought bordering on opacity, and great repetition. I was discouraged because the 'flaws' were so thoroughly embedded in the writing that I could not correct them without great difficulty, if at all. I wondered why I had not noticed them earlier. Why did they just appear at the very end of writing? On further reflection, I realized that my proofreading was like playing back a 45rpm recording on an earlier 78 rpm phonograph. The increase in speed totally alters the frequency of the recording and distorts the sound. I realized that the 'flaws' were really the consequence of the way the text had been written. The articles are semi-standalone essays that are the result of heartfelt prayer and painstaking thought. I tried to discern the inner 'voice' of the psalm both through the Hebrew words, historic and cultural 'reconstruction' and with sensitivity to the larger context of the biblical view of the ideas that each verse raised. Interesting 'rabbit trails' had to be suppressed to the footnotes and the flow of ideas compressed as much as possible to fit within the hour-long study session that each lesson was prepared for. Where the conceptual gap between succeeding sentences was too great an occasional footnote was inserted to help the reader bridge the gap and follow my reasoning more easily. These lessons were typically several days apart. When I reread the word, I read it in a very few sittings (where it had been intended for a much slower pace), and I did not bother to consult the footnotes, so many passages did not flow easily one after another. Why do I say all this?

I say this to warn the reader about four things critical to a successful reading of what is here presented. For maximum benefit, this text must be read slowly, sequentially, seriously, and (above all) spiritually. The individual essays should be read over a long period of time, perhaps with days between successive readings. Unlike other devotional works which present various unrelated passages of scripture for meditation, the flow of ideas presented here follows the psalm. Readings, therefore, should follow in the sequence in which they appear in the text. The flow of ideas is very compressed the result of long hours of meditation. The text should be read in the spirit in which it was written – prayerfully and meditatively. That will involve work! Where verses are cited in the text the reader is urged to go back and examine the verse cited. I have tried to ease that task by keeping the main verses under consideration in close proximity to the passage, but some references to earlier or later lines were inevitable. Please go back and look at the line and ponder what is said until you understand the point being made. In this way the 'idea-train' will not leave the station without your mind aboard! Finally, there are almost 1400 footnotes, and I urge you to read them. They serve several purposes: to identify where a Biblical quote comes from, to provide the full Biblical text where key phrases have been extracted, to reference other scholarly or devotional works quoted briefly, to present stubs of 'rabbit-trails' that the thoughtful reader might find interesting to pursue, and finally (as mentioned above) to provide conceptual bridges between successive sentences in the main body where the gap between ideas was perhaps a bit too far. In short: read the footnotes! Having said all this, I commend this text to the hand of God and to yours as well. If you will pray and seek, I am sure that God will answer and show you great and wonderful things out of His word. For those who will doubtless find my many errors, I accept full responsibility and welcome your corrections.

S.D.G.

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I. Understanding Hebrew Poetry¹

Poetry is the second most common literary form in the scriptures. Besides the Job, Psalms, Song of Songs and Lamentations, poetry is found throughout the Old Testament and in many places in the New Testament. Many of the prophetic oracles are poetic in form. This raises the question what is poetry?

Poetry involves much more than the clever use of certain sounds and word structure, which are in a sense only external. It represents a highly distilled form of communication that uses words sparingly but with great cognitive and affective impact. Poetry aims to move the heart. Hebrew poetry may be evaluated by the non-Hebrew speaking reader in two major areas: Structure and Language.

A. Structure: Perhaps the most accessible part of Hebrew poetry lies in its structure. Neither meter nor stanzas, as we know them in English poetry, map well into Hebrew poetry but something analogous to them does. "Sense units" are like stanzas and "parallelism" (rhyming ideas) is like rhyming words.

A.1 Structure – Sense units: When we look at a psalm we need to be aware of the various parts of it. Shifts between sense units may be marked by changes of purpose (from praising God to complaining about His treatment of his people); or content, speaker, grammar, or literary form. There may be a concentration of key words in a given section or the appearance of a refrain or repeated statement that marks the change. To find such divisions may take the beginning scholar several readings of the psalm under consideration, until the sense units become apparent to them. Consider the first octave of psalm 119 for example:

¹ For a more extensive explanation on how Hebrew Poetry works, see my notes on "Methods of Bible Study" pages 107 to 166

Sense unit

Psalm 119:1-8

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| 1 | <p>¹ Blessed are the undefiled in the way, Who walk in the law of the LORD</p> <p>² Blessed are they that keep his testimonies, And that seek him with the whole heart</p> <p>³ They also do no iniquity They walk in his ways</p> <p style="text-align: center;">❧</p> | <p>Addressee: Impersonal (or the reader) Objects: "they" - the blessed Content: Description of the blessed Function: To show the psalmist's desired state – blessedness</p> |
| 2 | <p>⁴ Thou hast commanded us To keep thy precepts diligently</p> <p style="text-align: center;">❧</p> | <p>Addressee: changes to God -"Thou" Objects: change from "they" to "us" Content: God's command Function: To show that God has commanded all alike</p> |
| 3 | <p>⁵ O that my ways were directed To keep thy statutes!</p> <p>⁶ Then shall I not be ashamed, When I have respect unto all thy commandments</p> <p>⁷ I will praise thee with uprightness of heart, When I shall have learned thy righteous judgments</p> <p>⁸ I will keep thy statutes O forsake me not utterly</p> | <p>Addressee: God "thy statutes" etc. Objects: change from "us" to "I" Form: Prayer with great desire Function: To enlist God's help to enter into blessedness.</p> |

A-2 Structure - Parallelism: Just as the stanza of English poetry corresponds roughly to the "sense unit" of Hebrew, so the concept of rhyming words corresponds (even more roughly) to the concept of rhyming ideas or parallelism. But Hebrew parallelism goes far beyond the simplistic rhyming of sounds in parallel verses. Parallelism is like using an old fashioned stereopticon in which the mind blends two photographs of the same object taken from slightly different perspectives (that of the left and right eye) to give the illusion of depth. This added "depth" tends to heighten or intensify the subject in hand. The relationship between successive lines can be exceedingly complex and will require careful attention to eke out the meaning conveyed by the subtle shifts in wording.

In order to understand Hebrew parallelism, it is necessary to understand the representational schema of the fundamental line of Hebrew poetry: the stich (pronounced stick from the Greek "stichos": a row or a line of writing).² In order to have parallelism at least two lines (a couplet or distich) and sometimes three lines (a triplet or tristich) are needed. Not unlike poetry in English, the related stichs are designated by capital letters (A,B,C) while the individual parts of each stich are designated by lower

² Some scholars prefer the term "colon" (plural "cola") while others refer to a verset or line.

case letters (a, b, c, d, ...). So for Psalm 119:1 we have: "Blessed are the undefiled in the way, who walk in the law of the LORD"

| | | | |
|---|-----------------------------|-------------|------------------------|
| | <i>a</i> | <i>b</i> | |
| A | Blessed are the undefiled | in the way, | |
| | <i>(a')</i> | <i>b'</i> | <i>c'</i> |
| B | (Blessed are the undefiled) | who walk | in the law of the LORD |

The parallelism here is a restated parallelism in which the second stich builds on the thought of the first. Stich A tells us that the blessed are undefiled in the way, but stich B tells us that they walk in the way already mentioned but adds a definition of what the way of stich A is. The way of blessedness is: "the law of the LORD". The second stich also omits "Blessed are the undefiled" In this case the second stich makes a reference back to the missing term in the first stich which is known as ellipsis or an elliptical reference. The structure carries forward the idea of blessedness from being undefiled (the absence of defilement) to the active walking in the law of the LORD and is represented as (*a b / b' c'*).

Consider Proverbs 14:34, a case in which the stichs contrast: "Righteousness exalts a nation, but sin is a disgrace to any people."

| | | | |
|---|---------------|---------------|----------------|
| | <i>a</i> | <i>b</i> | <i>c</i> |
| A | Righteousness | exalts | a nation, |
| | <i>-a</i> | <i>-b</i> | <i>-c</i> |
| B | but sin | is a disgrace | to any people. |

Syntactically the lines are parallel, but semantically they are the opposites of one another. So the second line is described as the negative of the first: (*abc / -a-b-c*).

Another example is found in Psalm 50:4 "He summons the heavens above, and the earth, that he may judge his people."

| | | | |
|---|--------------|------------------------|-------------------------------|
| | <i>a</i> | <i>b</i> | |
| A | He summons | the heavens above, and | |
| | <i>(a')</i> | <i>b'</i> | <i>c'</i> |
| B | (He summons) | the earth, | that he may judge his people: |

The second stich refers elliptically to the verb "He summons" in the first but adds additional information as to the purposes of that summons, i.e. judgment. The parallelism is again represented as (*ab/ b'c'*)

Representing the lines of Hebrew poetry in this way allows the reader to see more clearly the contrasts and reinforcements between successive lines as well as seeing how thoughts sometimes are carried forward in succession.

B. Language: By creating vivid word pictures, the poet does more than engage our thinking. He engages our feelings and our 'vision' as well, by making use of striking imagery like simile (comparisons using like or as) and metaphor (implied comparisons without like or as), which are the two most common forms.³

B.1 Simile A simile is a figure of speech that compares two things using the words "like" or "as". There are several uses of similes in the Bible: simple, paired, multiple, and extended. Simple similes involve just one comparison:

Now then, I will crush you
As a cart crushes
When loaded with grain.⁴

Here God threatens the immanence of his crushing judgment to be like the wheels of a heavily laden grain cart. He will roll over Israel and crush her into the dust.

Like a lily among thorns
Is my darling among the maidens.⁵

Here the lover extols the beauty of his beloved among the other women by comparing her to a solitary lily growing up among a field of thorns or brambles.

Similes may have attached comments:

Simile: He will be *like a tree* planted by the water
That sends out its roots by the stream.
Comment: It does not fear when heat comes;
Its leaves are always green.
It has no worries in a year of drought
And never fails to bear fruit."⁶

Paired similes make use of two successive similes to make a more complex comparison.

Their poison is *like the poison* of a serpent:
They are *like the deaf adder* that stoppeth her ear;
Which will not hearken to the voice of charmers,
charming never so wisely.⁷

In this case the wicked and their words are likened to the poison of a serpent and a particular serpent. The first image suggests the terrible damage that their poisoned words can do while the second addresses their inability to hear the words of others that might otherwise "charm" them and prevent their striking.

³ There are other patterns of language like parables (which are extended similitudes), allegories (which are extended metaphors), word play, personification, apostrophe, hyperbole, metonymy, synecdoche, and irony. These are beyond the scope of this note but the reader is directed to my work on Methods of Bible Study available on line at Cheshire Bible Chapel on line library.

⁴ Amos 2:13

⁵ Song of Solomon 2:2

⁶ Jeremiah 17:8

⁷ Psalm 58:4

Multiple similes heighten the effect of the picture. They may also be coupled with the parallelism of continuation.

So I will come upon them *like a lion*,
 Like a leopard I will lurk by the path.
Like a bear robbed of her cubs,
 I will attack them and rip them open.
Like a lion I will devour them;
 (*Like*) *a wild animal* will tear them apart.⁸

Notice the progression of action that each added simile suggests as the picture unfolds. The first scene is that of encountering a fearsome lion in the wild. With any encounter there is a possibility that the lion has not seen the unwary person. But the second simile makes quite clear such is not the case. Although the terrible encounter seems accidental, it is not. God has been waiting for them, watching for their approach as a leopard that lurks waiting for its prey to approach. With this sudden realization, the next simile paints the terrible ferocity of the attack, as sudden as a bear robbed of her cubs. All the vengeful fury is launched in a second. The final pair of similes paints what follows the ferocious attack. Israel is torn apart and devoured.

B.2 Metaphor The philosophical Greek might introduce the 23rd Psalm: ‘The Lord always takes good care of me.’ But how pale this seems in comparison to David’s famous metaphor: “The Lord is my shepherd”. This single line brings to mind all of David’s early life as well as many other Biblical pictures of shepherds on the hillside watching carefully over their sheep. It even anticipates our Lord’s famous metaphor “I am the good shepherd”. The disciples must have been startled when Jesus went far beyond David’s imagery when He said:

a *b*
I am the good shepherd:
 b' *c'*
 The good shepherd giveth his life for the sheep.⁹

They knew the image of the good shepherd from David’s assertion “I shall not want” But giving his life for the sheep was a new and striking thought in the image.

⁸ Hosea 13:7-8

⁹ John 10:11

A Spiritual Alphabet

(Asking the right Question ~ Not what but Who)



Search the scriptures; for in them ye think ye have eternal life: and they are they which testify of me.¹⁰

And he said unto them, 'These are the words which I spake unto you, while I was yet with you, that all things must be fulfilled, which were written in the law of Moses, and in the prophets, and in the psalms, concerning me.'¹¹



Its length and apparent repetition have discouraged many from even attempting to enter into this remarkable psalm. Some modern scholars taken up with exclusively rational approaches of higher criticism¹², have concluded that the psalm was "artificial and wearisome."¹³ But earlier scholars and many post-modern scholars have much greater respect for it. Augustine professed to have been long held back from commenting on it. He undertook a comment only after finishing his comments on all the other psalms and at the insistence of many acquaintances. The problem still remains as to how to approach such a very long and admittedly artificially constrained psalm. Beyond the alphabet there appears to be no structured principle, no argument for or development of a particular theme. It covers a number of themes and raises them periodically throughout the composition rather than expounding them systematically. In fact, the psalm seems ideally suited to that form of devotional reading popular in the middle ages, *Lectio Divina*, in which the reader reads until a particular passage arrests his attention at which point he stops to meditate or reflect with greater intent on what the passage means and how it sheds light on his life as well as similar or correlating passages of scripture. This may explain why believers of every age have found in this psalm a treasure trove of individual verses that have profound meaning for their lives.

In later commentaries individual themes have been proposed for the individual octaves of verses as they pertain to specific aspects of the spiritual life. This would make of the psalm a kind of spiritual encyclopedia for personal devotions. Charles Spurgeon, in his Treasury of David, used this approach to good effect. Some commentators (notably the great Russian commentator Theophan the Recluse) felt that because the Hebrew letters were not just letters but actually single letter words, in them lay the clue to the central meaning of each octave. Among writers in the "brethren" movement, the missionary Les Rainey held a similar view.¹⁴ While these notes do not reproduce their work, their

¹⁰ John 5:39

¹¹ Luke 24:44

¹² (i.e. looking at the internal and external evidences surrounding any ancient document to determine who, when, where, and why it was written)

¹³ See John Goldingay's citing of such criticism in his analysis of this psalm. John Goldingay Psalms Vol. 3 page 378.

¹⁴ Unfortunately, his hand-written manuscript was stolen and he never returned to the psalm to complete it. See "In Memorium" in this volume.

insights have been considered. The meanings of the individual letters do indeed appear to be lenses through which each octave may be viewed to good advantage. Accordingly, the alphabetic words have been set forth as a possible unifying sense for each octave. But that sense has not been so much imposed as drawn out of a consideration of the individual verses in a particular octave. The letter – word equivalent and a suggested significance is set forth below:

A Spiritual Alphabet for Psalm 119

1. א - ALEPH Knowledgeable Leader
 (Where can I find a knowledgeable leader for my spiritual life)
2. ב - BETH House or Dwelling
 (How can I become a house for God – Beth El?)
3. ג - GIMEL Camel
 (Who will help me bear the burdens of the Pilgrim Life?)
4. ד - DALETH Door
 (How do I enter the Kingdom of Heaven?)
5. ה - HE Behold, or to Reveal
 (Here is what must be done.)
6. ו - VAU Nail or Peg (Anchor)
 (The One on Whom all depends)
7. ז - ZAIN Sword
 (The comfort of the Sword of God's word)
8. ח - CHETH Fence
 (Respecting the Bounds that God sets)
9. ט - TETH Mud, clay
 (Difficult circumstances fashion the inner life)
10. י - JOD Hand
 (God's Hand creates and provides for everything)
11. כ - CAPH The palm of the hand
 (The Hand of God chastens and comforts)
12. ל - LAMED to Teach
 (Learning in God's classroom)
13. מ - MEM Water
 (Drinking from the Fount of all Blessing)
14. נ - NUN a Sprout or Generation, Tribe
 (The Family Tree of Virtue leads to Jesus)
15. ס - SAMECH to Support
 (Identification with Jesus Christ our Support)
16. ע - AIN Eye, vision
 (Looking unto Jesus)

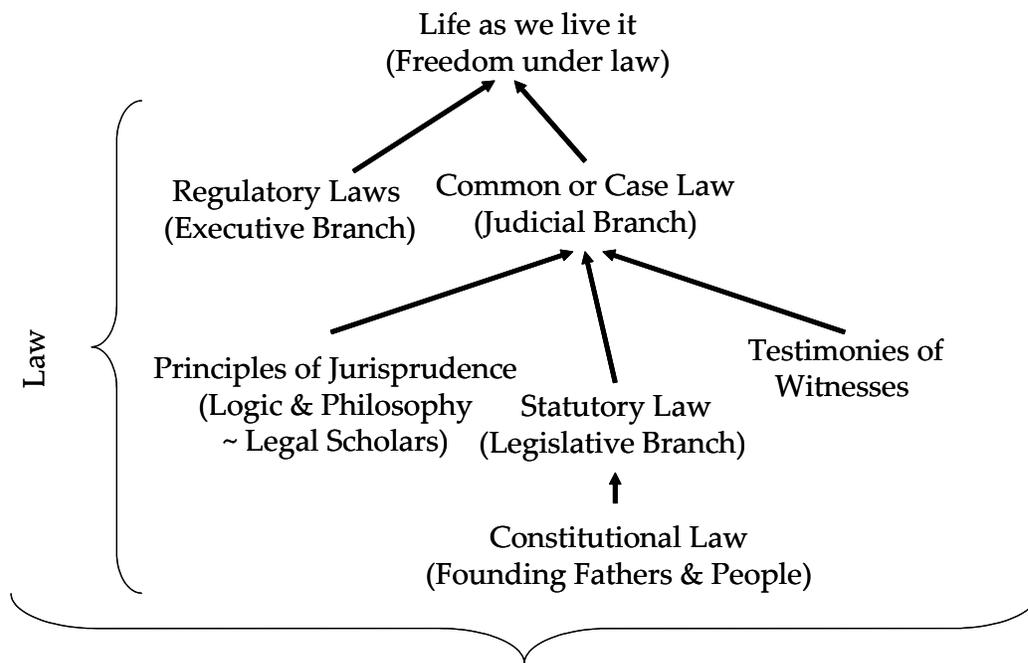
17. פ - PE Mouth, speech
(Recognizing when God speaks)
18. צ - TZADDI Righteousness of a Righteous Person
(The word reveals Jesus)
19. ק - KOPH To follow or an ape / monkey
(Learning to follow Jesus)
20. ר - RESH Head, (First or Highest: Captain, Cap Stone, Summit)
(Jesus the Head)
21. ש - SCHIN Tooth or Defense
(Defense in a life of spiritual battle)
22. ט - TAU Sign
(Signs of reaching the end)

II. Vocabulary as a Frame of Reference

The central idea of this psalm is that to be truly happy (blessed) we must enjoy a harmonious relationship with God in which we carefully observe to say and to do as His every word tells us. It is essentially a psalm about how we should respond to the LORD's governance and therefore it uses a legal vocabulary. The understanding of this vocabulary is central to understanding the psalm. The psalmist uses eleven different Hebrew words to describe God's communications for a total of 197 times in the 176 verses. The translators have rendered those eleven different Hebrew words into eight different English words. The words are neither synonymous with each other nor are they unrelated to each other. Indeed, their semantic range overlaps in both English and in Hebrew. Furthermore, the two word sets probably do not map well from one language to another (the classic problem of the translator). In short, their differences are subtle in both languages.

But this situation is not totally hopeless, because the human governance manifests certain basic legal structures that have not changed much with the passage of the ages. There were laws in Israel as there are laws today. There were law courts and judges for the orderly settling of disputes between parties then as now. And there was a hierarchical legal structure then as now. It is this last that can be of great help in understanding the subtleties of thought that the psalmist presents us with. If we take a simplistic look at our current legal structure and then, with that model in mind, consider the psalmist's vocabulary as well as the words the translators have chosen to represent them, we will gain a better understanding of what the psalmist is actually saying and why.

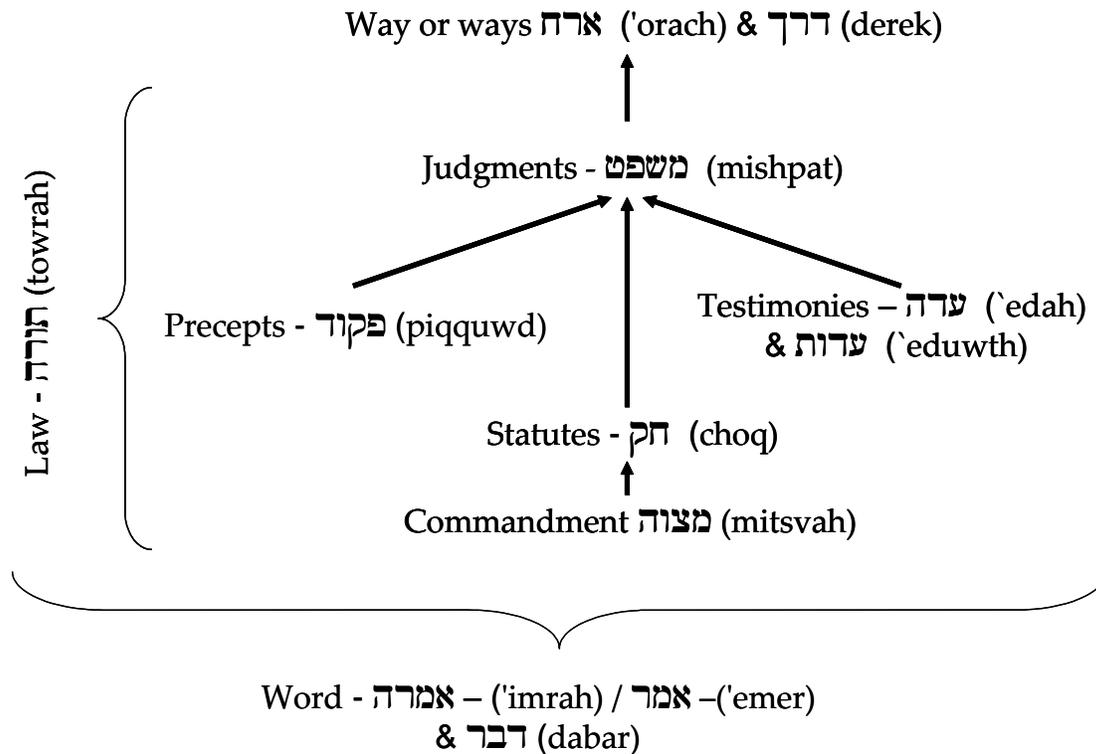
Without language it is impossible to have any rational basis for governance. Law, as a principle to regulate interpersonal behavior, doubtless existed well before humans could write. Oral law probably began along with oral tradition when stories were told around Stone Age campfires. The point is that the ability to communicate via some means of recognizable expression is essential for the rule of law. In our society, the written word provides not only permanence but stability, and the most stable of our laws lie in our Constitution. All other laws (written or understood) must pass muster for conformity with the Constitution and its amendments. They are foundational. The practice of interpreting the law at this level is called Constitutional Law. But by its very nature the Constitution cannot have foreseen every possible exigency of human life, particularly as the nature of our collective life changes with advancing technology or new and different problems. Accordingly, the legislative body of the government systematically enacts statutes to govern people operating under those new situations. This kind of law is called Statutory Law. Like all other laws it must rest on and be coherent with the Constitution and the judgments in Constitutional law. We might ask, "Is this new statute constitutional?" The word has priority.



Communication (oral & written)

Once a law has been enacted by the legislative branch, specific cases will arise that pose a problem of interpreting the statute. Law courts and judges get involved. Obviously, there is a hierarchy of law courts and judges, but for simplicity let us say that they are all involved in one way or another in applying the statutes. Typically, their process brings together three or four things: the principles of good jurisprudence, the statute in hand, witnesses who testify as to the specifics of the case, and past court decisions on similar cases. When a judgment is arrived at (typically in this country by appellate courts focused on interpreting the statute, not by civil or criminal courts applying the statute as a basis for establishing guilt or liability) the case becomes part of a large body known as “common law” or case law, earlier decisions setting precedents for court proceedings in later cases. In addition, the executive branch may impose regulatory laws as in the case of telecommunications or transport aimed at regulating business practice to insure public safety and well being. We refer to this whole process as the “rule of law” or simply “law”. We have freedom but it is freedom under law. We are free to do many things but not to propitiously hurt our neighbor directly or indirectly.

Now if we use this model to look at the eleven Hebrew words of this psalm and the English words used to translate them, we get a clearer picture of what the psalmist had in mind as he used them.



Word - This psalm is all about the LORD's governance as a means of blessing. But without words such blessing is not possible because He created us as beings with a mind that reasons, feelings that warn or encourage, and a will that can freely choose. And the words that are needed are His words, because He fulfills the three great roles of governance: legislative, judicial, and executive. There are three words translated "word" or "words" in this psalm. The use of "word" therefore stresses the widest sense of the communication of God with man. Two of the words used are closely related: אִמְרָה 'imrah, אִמֵּר 'emer, and the third is דְּבַר dabar (pronounced daw-baw').

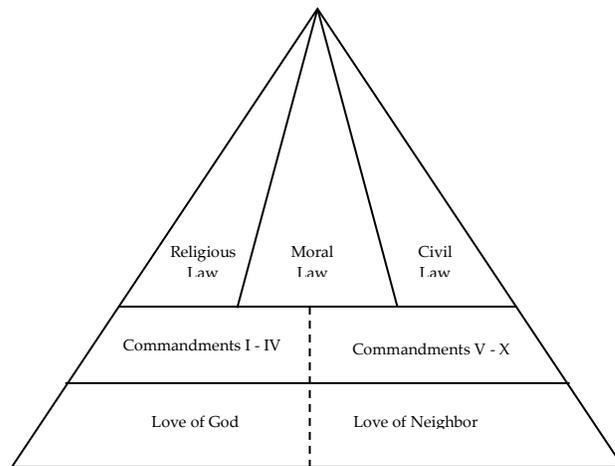
דְּבַר dabar comes from a primitive root meaning properly, to arrange; but used figuratively of words: to speak; hence, a word or by implication, a matter or thing as spoken of; adverbially, a cause for an action. Dabar refers more collectively to all that God has said. As such it provides a convenient way of looking at the entire vocabulary that follows and all the examples of each.

אִמְרָה 'imrah, (pronounced im-raw') or memrah {pronounced em-raw'} the feminine form of אִמֵּר 'emer, (pronounced ay'-mer) which comes from a primitive root meaning to say or to answer. 'Imrah refers to a particular expression or communication, a particular commandment, testimony, precept, statute or judgment.

Both words mean essentially the same thing; a commandment, a speech, a word, but דְּבַר dabar occurs 1290 times in the Old Testament, 23 times in this psalm; while אִמְרָה 'imrah occurs only 35 times, 19 times in this psalm. It is the remarkable that half the entire usage of such a relatively rare word occurs in this psalm alone but the nature of

its specificity is consistent with the highly personal nature of the psalm. The usage of 'imrah anticipates the old monastic greeting of young monks to their elders: "Abba give us a word." Their plea was for some true saying that the geron or old man had won through years of difficult spiritual struggle (aesthesis) that they could treasure up in their hearts and direct their lives by. It significant that, for the Christian, אִמְרָה 'imrah points to דְבַר דָּבָר *dabar* and דְבַר דָּבָר *dabar* points to the Λογος *logos*: Jesus - the Divine Expression - the Christ in Whom all that may be known of God is manifest as the full and complete expression of the God-head.¹⁵

Commandment - Strictly speaking this refers to the Decalogue, the "ten words" of God or the Ten Commandments.¹⁶ These are akin to our Constitution and form the basis of all the other statutory laws given to Israel by the hand of Moses.



The psalm uses the word מִצְוָה *mitsvah*, (pronounced mits-vaw') a command. In actual use it can refer to a foundational law, whether human or divine. But in this psalm it is always "thy commandments".

Statutes – The statutes are typically those laws relating to civil and criminal cases that would address every day situations. The psalm uses the term חֹק *choq*, (pronounced khome) from חָקַק *chaqak*, (pronounced khaw-kak') which in turn comes from a primitive root; meaning to hack or engrave and, by implication, to enact (laws being cut in stone or metal tablets in primitive times). Hence an enactment, law, statute or task. The sense is that these kinds of laws are written down as a kind of codex which judges could refer to in the pursuit of justice in everyday life.¹⁷

¹⁵ Colossians 2:9 "For in him dwelleth all the fullness of the Godhead bodily."

¹⁶ Our Lord uses the word commandment (εντολη - entole, (pronounced en-tol-ay)) in this way. In answering the rich young ruler, He says, "Why callest thou me good? There is none good but one, that is, God: but if thou wilt enter into life, keep the commandments.' He saith unto him, 'Which?' Jesus said, 'Thou shalt do no murder, Thou shalt not commit adultery, Thou shalt not steal, Thou shalt not bear false witness, Honor thy father and thy mother: and, Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself.'" Matthew 19:17 - 19

¹⁷ N.B. Verse 119:16 uses a feminine form of this word - חֻקָּה *chuqqah*, (pronounced khook-kaw') that means the same thing as חֹק *choq*, (pronounced khome).

Precepts – The psalm uses the word precepts in the sense of principles by which the judge (or the individual confronting life’s different situations) may reason about how to apply the commandments and statutes to a particular set of circumstances. It is a kind of moral reasoning that involves not only knowledge of both commands and statutes, but how their strictures work in a given set of circumstances to point to a moral solution. It involves moral reasoning based on principles or precepts or general rules. The reasoning process that moves the individual from the word in general to statute, from statute to precept, and from precept to ways is meditation.¹⁸ The word translated precepts is פִּקּוּדִים piquwd, (pronounced pik-kood’); meaning appointed, i.e. a mandate (of God; plural only, collectively, for the Law): precept.

Testimonies – In jurisprudence the truth about a given situation must be sought out with diligence. Testimonies were the words of people called to testify about what they heard or saw. It was experiential truth telling at its most elemental. Even today witnesses are sworn to tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth with God’s assistance. So fundamental is this necessary for protecting the rights of the individual that the ninth commandment is devoted to it.¹⁹ In this psalm, there are two roughly equivalent words translated as “testimony”: עֵדָה `edah (used 14 times) and עֵדוּת `eduwth (used 9 times). עֵדָה `edah, (pronounced ay-daw’) in its technical sense is a testimony; or a witness. עֵדוּת `eduwth, (pronounced ay-dooth’) is the feminine of עַד `ed, (pronounced ayd) which is a contraction of a primitive root; meaning to duplicate or repeat and (by implication) to protest or testify as by reiteration. Hence it means a testimony. As used in this psalm these words exclusively refer to God’s testimony which tells us about the realities of the situations that we find ourselves in. An accurate knowledge of the truth of a situation is essential to support our precept / statute / command based reasoning to arrive at an accurate and morally sound judgment.

Judgments²⁰ – The term judgments represent the summation of the entire process of reasoning (or meditating) about the application of the law to a specific set of circumstances. In this psalm it is invariably used of divine judgments not human judgments. Nevertheless, the full array of the content of judgment is preserved in the word used: מִשְׁפָּט mishpat, (pronounced mish-pawt’). It means, properly, a verdict (favorable or unfavorable) pronounced judicially, especially a sentence or formal decree including the act, the place, the suit, the crime, and the penalty. Abstractly it means justice, including a participant's right or privilege whether statutory or customary. Divine judgments are extremely valuable because they are, by reason of God’s infallibility, assuredly just and perfect in truth and equity. They constitute a kind of case

¹⁸ Verse 15 I will meditate in thy precepts, and have respect unto thy ways. ... Verse 23 Princes also did sit and speak against me: but thy servant did meditate in thy statutes. ... Verse 48 My hands also will I lift up unto thy commandments, which I have loved; and I will meditate in thy statutes. ... Verse 78 Let the proud be ashamed; for they dealt perversely with me without a cause: but I will meditate in thy precepts. ... Verse 148 Mine eyes prevent the night watches that I might meditate in thy word.

¹⁹ In both the original Decalogue (Exodus 20:16) and its recension in Deuteronomy 5:20 “Thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbor.” (“Neither shalt thou bear false witness against thy neighbor.”)

²⁰ also translated “ordinances” in verse 91

law that supports future reasoning on the part of the individual about the right way to go in similar situations in the future. There is clearly a didactic element in them so that the psalmist will say “teach me thy judgments.”²¹

Law – If we look at the entire process of the verbal supports of governance (constitutional, statutory, case, and judicial practice) we lump them under the general term “law”. In this psalm the term translated law is תּוֹרָה towrah, (pronounced to-raw’). It similarly refers to the various aspects of verbal governance in a summary way. But there is also a didactic element nascent in the word. It means not only a precept or a statute, or a command as in the Decalogue. It also refers to the five books of Moses: the Pentateuch. And the Pentateuch, which contains all these elements of the law, also contains the story of God’s dealing with mankind in general and Israel in particular. And throughout the intent is to teach the individual reader about what it means to be obedient to God as a way of worship and of leading a supremely happy life in harmony with God. So, the term Torah is also synonymous with teaching. One of the roles of judges is to teach about righteousness, which is why, in principle, they write out their opinions and lawyers study them. When we think about this psalm there is great emphasis on learning as well as obedience. The phrase “teach me thy statutes” or “teach me thy judgments” occurs nine times.²²

Way or Ways – Where does all this legal process lead us? It leads us to consider the way we live our lives every day. Everyone has ‘a way’ that we go. As believers, we are a people of the Way²³ which is to say that we are pilgrims and strangers.²⁴ This psalm uses two different words both translated as “way” or “ways”: אֹרַח 'orach (pronounced o'-rakh, used 5 times) and דֶּרֶךְ derek (pronounced deh'-rek, used 13 times). אֹרַח 'orach comes from a primitive root meaning to travel; hence a well-trodden road (literally or figuratively); also: a path, a byway or a highway. It is used three times in regard to the way of the wicked,²⁵ one time of the young man’s way,²⁶ and one time of God’s ways.²⁷ דֶּרֶךְ derek comes from a primitive root meaning to tread or, by implication, to walk, hence a road (as trodden) and figuratively, a course of life or mode of action. It is generally used in conjunction with one or another term relating to the law. The concept

²¹ :108b

²²:12 Blessed art thou, O LORD: teach me thy statutes. ... :26 I have declared my ways, and thou heardest me: teach me thy statutes. ... :33 Teach me, O LORD, the way of thy statutes; and I shall keep it unto the end. ... :64 The earth, O LORD, is full of thy mercy: teach me thy statutes. ... :66 Teach me good judgment and knowledge: for I have believed thy commandments. ... :68 Thou art good, and doest good; teach me thy statutes. ... :108 Accept, I beseech thee, the freewill offerings of my mouth, O LORD, and teach me thy judgments. ... :124 Deal with thy servant according unto thy mercy, and teach me thy statutes. ... :135 Make thy face to shine upon thy servant; and teach me thy statutes.

²³ In response to our Lord Jesus’ saying “I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me.” John 14:6

²⁴ Hebrews 11:13 “These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off, and were persuaded of them, and embraced them, and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth.” & 1 Peter 2:11 “Dearly beloved, I beseech you as strangers and pilgrims, abstain from fleshly lusts, which war against the soul.”

²⁵ :101a I have refrained my feet from every evil way. ... :104b ... I hate every false way. ... :128b ... I hate every false way.

²⁶ :9a Wherewithal shall a young man cleanse his way ?

²⁷ 15b I will ... have respect unto thy ways.

of the way as defined by God's word (in a positive sense – the way of the just and in a negative sense – the way of the wicked) is integral to the psalm's sense of human life as a pilgrimage in a wilderness. While the children of Abraham may have been settled in the land of promise for many years; in the psalms, they have preserved their sense of identity with their father Abraham as a pilgrim and a stranger. So, in this psalm the psalmist refers to himself as both a stranger (verse 19) and as a pilgrim (verse 54). Pilgrimage, then, is the implementation of God's way in the individual's life. The term "thy way" (in verse 37) is synonymous with "the way of thy testimonies" (verse 14), "the way of thy precepts" (verse 27), "the way of truth" (verse 30), "the way of thy commandments" (verse 32), and "the way of thy statutes" (verse 33). These are seen in clear distinction to (דֶּרֶךְ Derek) the way of lying (verse 29), as well as (אֲרָח 'orach) every evil way (verse 101), and every false way (verses 104 and 128).

Keep – Besides walking in a righteous way there is also the aspect of remembering and valuing implied by the word "keeping". The word "keep" is mentioned 21 times in this psalm. The word translated keep is שָׁמַר shamar, (pronounced shaw-mar') a primitive root meaning properly to hedge about (as with thorns), that is to guard or, generally, to protect. It is mentioned with respect to every descriptor of God's communication.

- | | |
|-----------------|--------------------------------|
| 1. Word | (verse 17, 57, 67, and 101) |
| 2. Commandments | (verse 60) |
| 3. Statutes | (verses 5, and 8) |
| 4. Precepts | (verses 4, 63, 134, and 168) |
| 5. Testimonies | (verses 88, 146, 167, and 168) |
| 6. Judgments | (verse 106) |
| 7. Law | (verses 34, 44, 55, and 136) |
| 8. Ways | (verse 9) |

In summary, the intent of the psalmist is to understand God's word in all its (admittedly judicial) aspects so that he can emulate those processes, make morally or ethically correct decisions and walk in a way that mirrors God's way. But for all his attention to the Word of God, there is still a note of personal failure necessitating salvation by God.²⁸ Like Paul after him, he acutely feels the need for the Savior in his life.²⁹

²⁸ The first personal reference and last verse of the psalm is significant in this way. Verse 5 "O that my ways were directed to keep thy statutes!" and verse 176 "I have gone astray like a lost sheep; seek thy servant; for I do not forget thy commandments."

²⁹ Romans 7:24 -25 "O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death? I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord. So then with the mind I myself serve the law of God; but with the flesh the law of sin."

III. Structure and Connectivity

(Putting the Pieces Together)



¹ Blessed are the undefiled in the way

...

⁵ O that my ways were directed to keep thy statutes!

...

^{8b} ... O forsake me not utterly.



⁹ Wherewithal shall a young man cleanse his way?

By taking heed thereto according to thy word



While the structure of this psalm tends to focus our attention on the individual octaves as almost stand-alone compositions, we should not lose sight of inter-octave connectedness. For example, the first octave begins with a bold statement about the individuals whom the psalmist styles “blessed.” Their blessedness involves, in part walking undefiled in the way. Verse 5 presents us the psalmist’s desire to be blessed. “O that my ways were directed to keep thy statutes!” We also have the nascent assessment of the psalmist’s spiritual state in contradistinction to the blessed. My ways do not keep thy statutes and because of this I am defiled. Along with his sense of defilement and longing for blessing, he tells us his greatest fear in his prayer (8b): “O forsake me not utterly.” His fear of being forsaken by a Holy God is rooted in his sense of defilement caused by his failure to obey God’s statutes. Given all this, the question raised in verse 9a becomes obvious. “Wherewithal shall a young man cleanse his way?”

In a general sense, interleaving the first two octaves sets the direction for the entire psalm. The psalm is not about Israel as they relate to God, but the individual’s relationship with the LORD. It reflects the realization that in all spirituality, true relationship with God, is first and foremost on the individual level. This assertion, however, raises the important question: what about the community of faith? It is clear that the community is not out of the psalmist’s view. After all, he began the psalm with the description of the blessed that walk in the way undefiled. It is also clear that he wants to be “in their number when the saints go marching in.” But the community of faith is not the principal focus. God is. Fellowship with other righteous people is an outgrowth of fellowship with God. Given that focus, the psalmist’s answer to the critical question of cleansing (“By taking heed thereto³⁰ according to thy word”) is an intensely personal answer. He is telling us that the community of the faithful cannot live my life for me. I must take responsibility for my own actions and the way that I have been walking in life. The fact that his reference to the individual’s way has gone

³⁰ The word “thereto” is an ellipsis referring back to the phrase “his way”.

from personal (“my ways” v.5) to general (“his way” v.9a) indicates that his answer, though personal, is really good for all people. As we move from Aleph to Beth, we have gone from a specific and personal case to a general but equally personal exploration of just how does a defiled human get right with God?

To the Christian, such an answer seems to fly in the face of the doctrine that the just shall live by faith as found in both the Old and New Testament.³¹ It is true, that the just shall live by faith (i.e. that sinful man is justified or brought into right relationship with God through faith in God’s word as was Abraham) and that “that no man is justified by the law in the sight of God.” But the psalmist is not talking here about establishing a relationship with God. Instead he is talking about maintaining an existing one. He is not dealing with justification but with sanctification. His view of sanctification is not just an event in which the individual is forensically declared holy (i.e. imputed righteousness) but as a process in which the individual increasingly moves in ways more pleasing to God.³² That he has a relationship with God is evident in His plea of verse 8b (“O forsake me not utterly”) which suggests that the psalmist of א and the young man of ב both have an ongoing relationship with God, Who has been accompanying them along their pathways of life (i.e. has not forsaken them despite their failures). This is further evidenced by his reference to “thy word” (9b) which he possesses as God’s gift, a gift that he feels the need to take greater heed to. The righteous do this. He has not. His path has drifted away from God’s way by his failure to observe God’s statutes. Having drifted away, he pleads that God not forsake as he has forsaken God. Here again, if the relationship had been founded on a contract, there would be no such hope. The psalmist’s departure from the least of God’s statutes would be a breach of contract rendering it null and void. But in a covenant, God, Who is not obligated by reason of His Holiness to forsake the defiled sinner, has a choice. To influence that choice the psalmist pleads that he will pay greater attention to those areas wherein he has strayed. That God’s holiness should not require the eternal damnation of the sinner is good news both for the psalmist and for us. We must look elsewhere as to why the holiness of God does not constrain Him to forsake the erring and sinful psalmist. The covenant looks forward to the Cross of Jesus as the surety of the fulfillment for all God’s promises and patience.

³¹ **Genesis 15:6** And he (Abraham) believed in the LORD; and he counted it to him for righteousness.

Romans 1:17, 4:3 “For therein is the righteousness of God revealed from faith to faith: as it is written, ‘The just shall live by faith.’ ... For what saith the scripture? ‘Abraham believed God, and it was counted unto him for righteousness.’”

Galatians 3:6, 11 “Even as Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness. ... But that no man is justified by the law in the sight of God, it is evident: for the just shall live by faith.”

Hebrews 10:38 “Now the just shall live by faith; but if any man draw back, my soul shall have no pleasure in him.”

James 2:23 “And the scripture was fulfilled which saith, ‘Abraham believed God, and it was imputed unto him for righteousness’: and he was called the Friend of God.”

³² Paul addresses this when he says in 2 Corinthians 7:1 “Having therefore these promises, dearly beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God.”

⚡ (ALEPH)

⚡ *The Blessed* ⚡

¹ Blessed are the undefiled in the way,
Who walk in the law of the LORD

² Blessed are they that keep his testimonies,
And that seek him with the whole heart

³ They also do no iniquity
They walk in his ways

⚡ *The Command to All* ⚡

⁴ Thou hast commanded us
To keep thy precepts diligently

⚡ *The Psalmist's Desire* ⚡

⁵ O that my ways were directed
To keep thy statutes!

⁶ Then shall I not be ashamed,
When I have respect unto all thy commandments

⁷ I will praise thee with uprightness of heart,
When I shall have learned thy righteous judgments

⁸ I will keep thy statutes
O forsake me not utterly

⚡

⚡ - ALEPH means knowledge or an individual who is a leader because of his knowledge. It is the first letter of Adoni and synonymous with Lord. It begins the alphabet and has priority. It also introduces us to the knowledge of the spiritual life. And that life centers on the word that God speaks to us and how we respond to it. So, the passage introduces us to the vocabulary necessary to think properly about the character of God's communication. As noted, the words first introduced here will reoccur throughout the remainder of the psalm.

This octave begins with a double blessing. There are two words in the Old Testament used for blessing: **בָּרַךְ** barak and **אֵשֶׁר** 'esher. **בָּרַךְ** barak comes from a primitive root meaning to kneel and means, by implication, to bless God as an act of adoration and worship, or for God to bless man as He did with Abraham. **אֵשֶׁר** 'esher, on the other hand, means to be happy. The two words are not unrelated. Barak (God's blessing) establishes relationship, while 'esher describes a harmonious relationship. In that sense, 'esher rests upon barak. To seek the one is to desire the other. Both words occur in this psalm. In verses 1 and 2 the word translated blessed is **אֵשֶׁר** 'esher. Verses 1-3 describe the underlying reasons why the person is so supremely happy. They are undefiled. They walk in accordance with the law of the LORD. They are undefiled because they do no iniquity, not because they have been ceremonially cleansed from wrongdoing. In

short, these folks are blessed because they get it right the first time and their relationship with God is harmonious. בָּרַךְ barak occurs in verse twelve where the psalmist affirms that God is supremely worthy to teach him His statutes. These are the only uses of these words in the entire psalm.

In verse four, the focus shifts from “they” to “us.” In verses 5 to 8, the psalmist is clearly looking at himself. In verse ‘they’ got it right. In verse 4: God has spoken to all of ‘us’. But in verse 5, the psalmist begins with a lament on himself and his shortcomings. “O that my ways were directed to keep thy statutes!” He is saying, in effect, I wish I was like those folks who are blessed because they get it right the first time. This shift of focus from the anonymous ‘blessed they’ to a ‘wishful I’ who doesn’t quite get it right the way they do sets the tension that will be felt throughout this psalm. The psalmist knows where he is spiritually. He knows where he wants to be spiritually. And he knows how to get there.³³ He knows the way of blessing, and going in that way is what this psalm is all about.

Where he is: It is easy enough to back out of his wishful thinking where the psalmist really thinks he is spiritually. All his longings are cast in the future tense unlike the anonymous they who are getting it right at the present moment. “O that my ways were directed to keep thy statutes!” Evidently, they are not, at least not consistently. “Then shall I not be ashamed when I have respect unto all thy commandments” Evidently, he was ashamed for not respecting ALL of God’s commands. “I will praise thee with uprightness of heart, when I shall have learned thy righteous judgments.” Evidently, he felt that he lacked knowledge of God’s judgments and that this was the cause for his failure to properly praise God. His heart was not upright or right with God. He addresses his deepest fear with the promise “I will keep thy statutes” and the tragic plea, “O forsake me not utterly.” The two admittedly pious exclamations are like book ends around a host of longing. “O that my ways were directed to keep thy statutes! ... O forsake me not utterly” Clearly the psalmist is not where he wants to be.

Where he wants to be: The psalmist wants to be among the blessed. He wants to be where God wants him to be. From the beginning, God has desired to bless humanity. He blessed (בָּרַךְ barak) our first parents in Eden.³⁴ God promises Abraham to bless the whole world through Abraham and his seed.³⁵ It was the desire to secure the blessing of God that motivated Jacob the supplanter his whole life. But he could not obtain that

³³ These three realizations underlay the prayers of petition in which this psalm abounds. The tension between where we are and where we long to be is the motivation for such prayer. The knowledge of how to get to where we long to be involves our recognition of the necessity of the power of God being manifest in our lives.

³⁴ Genesis 1:27 – 28 So God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them. And God blessed them, and God said unto them, Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth, and subdue it: and have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over every living thing that moveth upon the earth.

³⁵ Genesis 22:15 -18 And the angel of the LORD called unto Abraham out of heaven the second time, And said, By myself have I sworn, saith the LORD, for because thou hast done this thing, and hast not withheld thy son, thine only son: That in blessing I will bless thee, and in multiplying I will multiply thy seed as the stars of the heaven, and as the sand which is upon the sea shore; and thy seed shall possess the gate of his enemies; And in thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed; because thou hast obeyed my voice.

blessing by force or cleverness. His whole life was spent wrestling in vain with God for that blessing, until at Peniel; he came face to face with his powerlessness and inability and was blessed in his weakness, defeat, and desperate clinging to God in faith and hope.³⁶ The psalmist knows that there can be only one way of blessing, God's way. His holiness forbids the rewarding of disobedience. So, the psalmist begins his psalm by explaining the way of blessing as our Lord Jesus did in His sermon on the mount with the Beatitudes.³⁷ It is not enough to be in the right way, one must also be active in it. It is not enough to know what is right; one must also do the right thing in order to be blessed. James underscores this. "Whoso looketh into the perfect law of liberty, and continueth therein, he being not a forgetful hearer, but a doer of the work, this man shall be blessed in his deed."³⁸ It is not enough to be undefiled in the way; one must actively walk in the law (Torah) and observe to do what one has been taught.

How to get there: There are no maps in the spiritual life, only guidebooks written by those who have gone before. Moses was one such. He was supremely blessed. He, like few others, had discoursed with God face to face.³⁹ Moses wrote such a guide book, the Torah. In order to talk about the way of blessing, we must be able to describe it with words. So besides setting the fundamental tension of this long psalm of desiring yet not quite yet having obtained, it also introduces us to a specialized vocabulary. To hear and to do what God says is central. But how do we describe what God says. The psalmist introduces eleven different words in Hebrew that each reflect a nuanced meaning to aspects of God's communication with man and man's appropriate response to that communication. And the majority of these are introduced here in this first section. It is a vocabulary that will be used extensively throughout the remainder of the psalm.

But what the psalmist really wants, perhaps without knowing it, is not a guide book but a leader, an aleph (א). He wants someone who knows all about the spiritual life and who will lead him into fellowship with God. Paul tells us that "all have sinned, and

³⁶ Genesis 32:24 - 32 And Jacob was left alone; and there wrestled a man with him until the breaking of the day. And when he saw that he prevailed not against him, he touched the hollow of his thigh; and the hollow of Jacob's thigh was out of joint, as he wrestled with him. And he said, Let me go, for the day breaketh. And he said, I will not let thee go, except thou bless me. And he said unto him, what is thy name? And he said, Jacob. And he said, Thy name shall be called no more Jacob, but Israel: for as a prince hast thou power with God and with men, and hast prevailed. And Jacob asked him, and said, Tell me, I pray thee, thy name. And he said, wherefore is it that thou dost ask after my name? And he blessed him there. And Jacob called the name of the place Peniel: for I have seen God face to face, and my life is preserved.

³⁷ Matthew 5:3 - 12 ① Blessed are the poor in spirit: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. ② Blessed are they that mourn: for they shall be comforted. ③ Blessed are the meek: for they shall inherit the earth. ④ Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness: for they shall be filled. ⑤ Blessed are the merciful: for they shall obtain mercy. ⑥ Blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see God. ⑦ Blessed are the peacemakers: for they shall be called the children of God. ⑧ Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness' sake: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. ⑨ Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake. Rejoice, and be exceeding glad: for great is your reward in heaven: for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you.

³⁸ James 1:25

³⁹ Exodus 33:9 - 11 And it came to pass, as Moses entered into the tabernacle, the cloudy pillar descended, and stood at the door of the tabernacle, and the LORD talked with Moses. And all the people saw the cloudy pillar stand at the tabernacle door: and all the people rose up and worshipped, every man in his tent door. And the LORD spake unto Moses face to face, as a man speaketh unto his friend. And he turned again into the camp: but his servant Joshua, the son of Nun, a young man, departed not out of the tabernacle.

come short of the glory of God.”⁴⁰ The psalmist would be justified in sharing the experience of John on Patmos who said, “I wept much, because no man was found worthy...”⁴¹ But, thanks be to God, such weeping is unnecessary. There is One who did no sin,⁴² who knew no sin,⁴³ and in whom there is no sin⁴⁴ – Jesus: Word of the Father, the LOGOS. He is that Aleph (Ⲁ), that alpha (α), who knows the spiritual life in its entirety, and is willing and able to lead us in the way of the LORD.

On Prayer

¹ Blessed are the undefiled in the way,
Who walk in the law of the LORD.

² Blessed are they that keep his testimonies,
And that seek him with the whole heart

³ They also do no iniquity
They walk in his ways



As we begin to look in detail at this extensive psalm, it is wise to consider first some thoughts on the nature of prayer. In order for prayer to be effectual it must rest upon the foundation of faith in God. “But without faith it is impossible to please him: for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him.”⁴⁵ Faith, therefore, is essential, which is why the “prayer of faith”⁴⁶ is so called. Communication of any sort rests upon the awareness of the presence of the one being communicated with, even if we are talking to ourselves. We must be aware of the one to whom we address ourselves. It is by the eye of faith, that we become aware of the presence of God. Hence for spiritual examples like Brother Lawrence practicing the presence of God is really exercising the ‘eye of faith’ until the reality of God’s omnipresence is securely fastened in the purview of our perception of reality. And for him, as for us, prayer then becomes a natural matter of course regardless of circumstances. The faith-perception of God’s presence is a necessary but not sufficient condition for prayer. Prayer also requires hope: hope that God will not only hear our prayers, but answer them; hope that God “is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him” in prayer. We are told for this reason by our Lord Jesus to persevere in prayer.⁴⁷ Underlying all this is a great confidence in the love of God.

⁴⁰ Romans 3:23

⁴¹ Revelation 5:4a

⁴² 1 Peter 2:22

⁴³ 2 Corinthians 5:21

⁴⁴ 1 John 3:5

⁴⁵ Hebrews 11:6

⁴⁶ James 5:15 And the **prayer of faith** shall save the sick, and the Lord shall raise him up; and if he have committed sins, they shall be forgiven him.

⁴⁷ Luke 18:1-8 And he spake a parable unto them to this end, that men ought always to pray, and not to faint; Saying, There was in a city a judge, which feared not God, neither regarded man: And there was a widow in that city; and she came unto him, saying, Avenge me of mine adversary. And he would not for a while: but afterward he said within himself, Though I fear not God, nor regard man; Yet because this widow troubleth me, I will avenge her, lest by her continual coming she weary me. And the Lord said,

Prayer requires awareness of our self and of our state before God. And sometimes our state is defined in terms of negation, what we are not. The psalmist begins this passage with the three-fold description of the blessed. The blessed are undefiled in the way, walking in the law of the LORD. They keep his testimonies, and seek him with their whole heart. They also do no iniquity while they walk in his ways. If we remember that the term blessed is (in old English, at least) a synonym for one who is supremely happy (i.e. bliss-ed), then we have here a proposed formula for that which so much of the world seeks: happiness. But the psalmist, like many in the world, is not happy. He wished he were, but there is dissatisfaction with the state of his life as the next verse makes clear. "O that my ways were directed to keep thy statutes!"⁴⁸

Prayer also requires love which focuses on human need whether our own or that of another whom we love. And love, whether the proper love of our self or of another, is at once the basis of prayer and of obedience.⁴⁹ Love which underlies true and effectual prayer also requires action on our part, even if the only action that we have left to us is to pray. It is the compliment and evidence of faith.⁵⁰ Faith works by love in doing what it can and looking to God to do what it cannot do. So, prayer involves faith, hope, love, and awareness.

Prayer involves choice: a choice between doing things our own way or God's way. "Thy will be done" was central to our Lord's prayer-life⁵¹ and it is central in this psalm. Again: "O that my ways were directed to keep thy statutes!" Because there is choice, there is the possibility of making wrong choices. And wrong choices lead to inappropriate prayer: prayer that is asked for selfish and unloving reasons. "Ye ask, and receive not, because ye ask amiss."⁵²

The core choice of prayer might be understood under the rubric of "not what but who." If salvation, for example, is seen only as a desirable end that involves solely the individual, then the question invariably centers on the actions we must take to achieve it. It is in this sense that the young ruler asks Jesus, "What good thing shall I do, that I may have eternal life?"⁵³ But if salvation is seen as the restoration of relationships, first

Hear what the unjust judge saith. And shall not God avenge his own elect, which cry day and night unto him, though he bear long with them? I tell you that he will avenge them speedily. Nevertheless when the Son of man cometh, shall he find faith on the earth?

⁴⁸ Psalm 119:5

⁴⁹ Deuteronomy 11:1 Therefore thou shalt love the LORD thy God, and keep his charge, and his statutes, and his judgments, and his commandments, always.

Matthew 22:37-40 Jesus said unto him, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself. On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets.

⁵⁰ Galatians 5:6 For in Jesus Christ neither circumcision availeth any thing, nor uncircumcision; (i.e. externalism or external conformity) but faith which worketh by love (i.e. true obedience).

⁵¹ Luke 22:42 Saying, Father, if thou be willing, remove this cup from me: nevertheless not my will, but thine, be done.

⁵² James 4:1-4 From whence come wars and fightings among you? Come they not hence, even of your lusts that war in your members? Ye lust, and have not: ye kill, and desire to have, and cannot obtain: ye fight and war, yet ye have not, because ye ask not. Ye ask, and receive not, because ye ask amiss, that ye may consume it upon your lusts. Ye adulterers and adulteresses know ye not that the friendship of the world is enmity with God? Whosoever therefore will be a friend of the world is the enemy of God.

⁵³ Matthew 19:16-22 And, behold, one came and said unto him, Good Master, what good thing shall I do, that I may have eternal life? And he said unto him, Why callest thou me good? there is none good but one, that is, God: but if thou wilt enter into life, keep

between God and self and then between self and one's neighbor, then the question asked invariably reflects that sense of relationship: "Who shall deliver me?"⁵⁴ The first is an 'I-it' view of life where even God, Himself, is denied Personhood as though He were some kind of heavenly vending machine from which, if we can find the right pocket change, we can get whatever we want. In the second, God is the person that we want to be with forever, but with Whom we can only relate by His mercy and grace.

The key question then as we approach this psalm (with its many references to law, commandments, precepts, statutes, and judgments) is in what manner is the psalmist praying? Perhaps the simplest and best answer can be found in its very last verse. "I have gone astray like a lost sheep; seek thy servant; for I do not forget thy commandments."⁵⁵ The psalmist knows the commandments. He also is aware that he has not nor can he keep them. He has gone astray and cries out like a lost sheep for its shepherd. And in this we hear the voice of humanity. "All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned everyone to his own way; and the LORD hath laid on him the iniquity of us all."⁵⁶ In this last verse, we see at once the Person who is the source of our salvation and the price that He paid to secure it for us.

Blessedness

- ¹ Blessed are the undefiled in the way,
Who walk in the law of the LORD.
² Blessed are they that keep his testimonies,
And that seek him with the whole heart.
³ They also do no iniquity:
They walk in his ways.



This psalm begins the way the way psalm 1 begins, with the description of the blessed individual:

"Blessed is the man that walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly,
Nor standeth in the way of sinners,
Nor sitteth in the seat of the scornful"

But what does the psalmist mean by the term "blessed"? Whether it is the politician closing a speech with the almost ubiquitous invocation: "God bless America" or the musical reminder to "count your many blessings", the term blessing punctuates societal

the commandments. He saith unto him, Which? Jesus said, Thou shalt do no murder, Thou shalt not commit adultery, Thou shalt not steal, Thou shalt not bear false witness, Honor thy father and thy mother: and, Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself. The young man saith unto him, All these things have I kept from my youth up: what lack I yet? Jesus said unto him, If thou wilt be perfect, go and sell that thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven: and come and follow me² But when the young man heard that saying, he went away sorrowful: for he had great possessions.

⁵⁴ Romans 7:24-25 O wretched man that I am! Who shall deliver me from the body of this death? I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord. So then with the mind I myself serve the law of God; but with the flesh the law of sin.

⁵⁵ Psalm 119:176

⁵⁶ Isaiah 53:6

thought. We even have a national holiday to express our gratitude to God for our many blessings. If we should list them, what a wide variety of “blessings” there would be. We describe adverse circumstances as a “blessing in disguise.” Many would consider health and wealth to be exemplary blessings. But the psalmist knows that wicked people may also have great wealth and be quite healthy while the poor suffer deprivation and sickness for want of proper medical care. “I was envious at the foolish, when I saw the prosperity of the wicked. For there are no bands in their death: but their strength is firm. They are not in trouble as other men; neither are they plagued like other men.”⁵⁷ Are we then to believe that wicked men are blessed and poor people cursed? If we subscribe to such a view, how are we to understand the descriptions of the blessed individual found here and in psalm 1? Is blessing a gratuitous gift of God, as was the case with Abraham⁵⁸ or is it something earned by dint of our walking in the law of the LORD, keeping his testimonies, and seeking him with our whole heart? Does blessing come by means of works or is it of grace?

These problems arise, in part, from the paucity of English when it comes to the concepts surrounding blessing. We have one word, but Hebrew uses two words regularly translated blessing. The first, בָּרַךְ *barak*, is a primitive root meaning to kneel before God as an act of adoration and by implication to bless God and (vice-versa) to kneel before God to receive the benefit of His favor. Both involve articulation or the use of the modulated breath. In Abraham’s case he will also be a blessing, בִּכְרָה *Berakah* from *Barak* meaning a benediction – a good saying, the breath of God which vouchsafes (by implication) prosperity. In the Old Testament prosperity was generally seen as both physical (health, wealth, children, etc.) and spiritual (protection, enlightenment, spiritual direction, etc.). The word used for blessing in Psalm 1 and in Psalm 119 is אֵשֶׁר *'esher*, from אָשַׁר *'ashar*, a primitive root meaning physically to be straight, level or right and figuratively, to be honest. Hence *'esher* means happiness; and is used here in its masculine plural construction as an interjection, how happy are they! In the New Testament there are also two words in Greek with the same difference. The first word corresponding to *barak* is εὐλογητός (*eulogetos*) from εὐλογεῖν (*eulogeo*) a compound word meaning to speak well of the Divine, or (religiously) to bless God.⁵⁹ Indeed *eulogeo* is used only in conjunction with people blessing God. Our English word *eulogy* comes from this. The second word is μακάριος (*makarios*) a prolonged form of the poetical *makar* which means blessed or happy. The prolonged form suggests one who is supremely blest and, by extension, supremely happy. It is well translated by the old English word “bliss”. One who was supremely happy was ‘blissed’ or blessed. In Jesus’ beatitudes, He uses the word *makarios*. In summary, to be blessed of God, as was

⁵⁷ Psalm 73:3-5

⁵⁸ Genesis 12:1-2 “Now the LORD had said unto Abram, Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and from thy father’s house, unto a land that I will shew thee: and I will make of thee a great nation, and I will bless thee, and make thy name great; and thou shalt be a blessing;”

⁵⁹ Luke 1:68 Blessed (εὐλογητός *eulogetos*) be the Lord God of Israel; for he hath visited and redeemed his people.

Abraham, is a once in a lifetime event that describes God's sovereign election of the individual or people as an expression of His unmerited favor and His inscrutable providence. While Jacob spends his whole life trying to obtain (or wrest) the patriarchal blessing of Abraham vouchsafed in Isaac, God has intended him to have the blessing, the Berak, from the first.⁶⁰ For this reason, God reaffirms His intention to convey the Abrahamic blessing to Jacob at Bethel.⁶¹ The story ends with Jacob's losing battle with God at Peniel in which he finally obtains the blessing.⁶² The blessing of God is essentially bound up in the relationship of the individual or people with God. "Thy name shall be called no more Jacob, but Israel: for as a prince hast thou power with God and with men, and hast prevailed." Blessing, Barak, involves the establishment of a covenantal relationship with God, a relationship in which both parties have responsibilities to one another. Blessing, 'esher, is the supreme happiness that accrues to the individual who has already been blessed, barak, by God. In this psalm, the fundamental blessing of a covenant with God is not in question. The entire psalm rests upon that reality. As part of the covenant relationship, God has given His commandments, statutes, precepts, testimonies, judgments, and law. The psalmist well knows that God is his God and the he is the LORD's servant. What is motivating the psalmist is that happiness accrues to the individual who works at that covenantal relationship diligently. And that means that happiness comes to those who to 'walk undefiled in the law of the LORD, who keep his testimonies, and who seek him with the whole heart' (i.e. those whose lives please God). Happiness (or blessedness) is not primarily a function of materiality.⁶³ Happiness is relational. That should not be a surprise to any of us. How many of our relationships require continual work to maintain a happy state? The miserable rich man; the man who is compassed about with pride; and for whom violence is a garment; the man whose eyes stand out for fatness; who has more than heart could wish; the man who is corrupt and speaks wickedly concerning oppression and loftily against the heavens saying "How does God know? And is there knowledge in the most High"; the man who prospers in the world and increases in riches; that man is definitely not happy, despite the apparent "blessings" of materiality that surround him.⁶⁴ Such a one would doubtless take issue with what is

⁶⁰ Romans 9:10-13 And not only this; but when Rebecca also had conceived by one, even by our father Isaac; (For the children being not yet born, neither having done any good or evil, that the purpose of God according to election might stand, not of works, but of him that calleth;) It was said unto her, The elder shall serve the younger. As it is written, Jacob have I loved, but Esau have I hated.

⁶¹ Genesis 28:10-22 Although the blessing was without condition, Jacob is not comfortable with such a state and makes of the blessing a *quid pro quo* in which he promises that "this stone, which I have set for a pillar, shall be God's house: and of all that thou shalt give me I will surely give the tenth unto thee."

⁶² Genesis 32:24-32 The key event being Jacob's insistence "I will not let thee go, except thou bless (barak) me." And Jacob's name is changed from Jacob (supplanter) to Israel (a prince who prevails with God).

⁶³ While material prosperity may have been seen as an evidence of God's good pleasure with the individual in the Old Testament, (as in Proverbs 16:7, for example, "When a man's ways please the LORD, he maketh even his enemies to be at peace with him.") in the New Testament it is almost exclusively spiritual. Indeed Jesus' radical use of happiness in describing all manner of painful situations in the Beatitudes points away from materiality as a measure of happiness. Those who are persecuted for righteousness sake are truly happy because God is well pleased with their suffering for His sake. Their happiness is not seen in the consolation of immediate materialities but in eternal reward in time to follow. "Rejoice, and be exceeding glad: for great is your reward in heaven: for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you." Matthew 5:12

⁶⁴ Psalm 73:6-12

said here, but the opening of this psalm reminds us that happiness consists in having not only our vertical relationship right with God but our horizontal relationships right with our fellow man as well. And establishing a sound basis for those horizontal relationships with humanity and a sound basis for that all important vertical relationship with God is what the cross of Christ was all about.⁶⁵

Integrity

¹ Blessed are the undefiled in the way,
Who walk in the law of the LORD.

² Blessed are they that keep his testimonies,
And that seek him with the whole heart.



The first two verses of this psalm are clearly parallel but with interplay between an interior view of the blessed and an exterior view of them. The blessed “walk in the Law of the LORD” (exterior - action) but they “seek him with the whole heart” (interior - attitude). They are “undefiled in the way” (interior – character) but they “keep his testimonies” (exterior – action). In so doing the verse suggests the secret of their happiness: integrity. “Behavior without attitude would not be enough; attitude without behavior would not be enough. Indeed, the psalm assumes that one cannot have behavior characterized by integrity without the right attitude of heart; and one cannot have the right attitude of heart without that being expressed outwardly.”⁶⁶ But life whose interior and exterior aspects are coherent (i.e. a life with integrity), while necessary for happiness, is clearly not sufficient. These verses assert (and take for granted) that happiness derives from the direction of the interior spiritual life. Present behavior (they keep his testimonies) and past history (they are undefiled) are both derived from the interior habit of seeking the LORD “with the whole heart.” In summary, the psalmist is telling us that happiness lies in a life of integrity anchored in God. It ultimately comes from within not without. But what does it mean to be anchored in God?

The psalmist knows that God has spoken His word (His laws, precepts, testimonies, judgments) as part of the covenant with His people and that word both restrains and constrains. But a life of restraint and constraint might not seem happy to all. For many, happiness consists in living unrestrained lives, in being able to do whatever they want to do (right or wrong) with impunity. Others might argue that moral restraints are really necessary for happiness. But whose, we ask, theirs or God’s? For self-directed individuals (i.e. those who disavow any external absolutes of right and wrong as well as

⁶⁵ Ephesians 2:14 – 16 “For he is our peace, who hath made both one, and hath broken down the middle wall of partition between us; Having abolished in his flesh the enmity, even the law of commandments contained in ordinances; for to make in himself of twain (i.e. Jew and Gentile) one new man, so making peace; And that he might reconcile both unto God in one body by the cross, having slain the enmity thereby”

⁶⁶ John Goldingay Psalms Vol. III page 382

those who define their own right and wrong) their “seeking” lies wholly within themselves. The psalmist would reject both of these views as a basis for happiness.

In reading these verses, then, we may validly infer that un-righteous and self-righteous people are not truly happy because both their ways of life are anchored in themselves and not in God. Doubtless such might object that they are truly happy. But herein lays one of the most dangerous spiritual conditions. “‘The farther a man wanders from God, the happier does he imagine himself to be.’ Yet following the endless (*self-defined*⁶⁷) bypaths of instead of the right path ends in ruin and destruction.”⁶⁸ The critical difference, the anchor - if you will, lies in “seeking”. But seeking here is not exactly like seeking a buried treasure. The word is שָׁרַח (pronounced daw-rash') a primitive root meaning (properly) to tread or frequent and, by implication, to seek or ask. The word gives the sense of a well-worn path to a familiar person that has been followed many times not an undiscovered path leading to a hidden treasure. The LORD is not hidden from His people, and those who seek Him do so with great regularity. The ‘pathway’ to His presence is well worn, having been traversed many times a day for years. And the reason for the frequent travels lies in the daily complexity of staying in the way and hence of being undefiled by any departure from it. Later on, the psalmist will tell us “Thy word is a lamp unto my feet and a light unto my path.”⁶⁹ But the frequency also derives from the joy of receiving the reward of ‘light’ given to those seeking it. We tend to repeat what gives us the reward of joy. It is this desire for light and joy at receiving light that is a central motivator toward happiness. It will be John the Apostle who builds the mystical case for what lies just below the surface of these verses.

*“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. The same was in the beginning with God. All things were made by him; and without him was not anything made that was made. In him was life; and **the life was the light of men.** And **the light shineth in darkness;** and the darkness comprehended it not. There was a man sent from God, whose name was **John.** The same came for a witness, to bear witness of the Light that all men through him might believe. He was not that Light, but was sent to bear witness of that Light. That was the true Light, which lighteth every man that cometh into the world. He was in the world, and the world was made by him, and the world knew him not. He came unto his own, and his own received him not. But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name: Which were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God.”⁷⁰*

In a remarkable way by addressing themselves to happiness, these first two verses look forward to the various pictures of the Messiah that will occur in this psalm and to the fullness of later revelations of Him – as the source of human happiness.

⁶⁷ my addition

⁶⁸ Goldingay quoting John Calvin on psalms (3:403) - ibid.

⁶⁹ Psalm 119:105

⁷⁰ John 1:1-13

A Whole Heart

² Blessed are they that keep his testimonies,
And that seek him with the whole heart.



Heretofore, we have considered the concept of profound happiness (“blessed” - אֲשֶׁר 'esher) and its rooted-ness the coherent harmony of the inner life (the undefiled ...) with outer life (...who walk in the law of the LORD). The successful integration of the inner and outer aspects of the whole person rests upon the little phrase “the whole heart” in the verse before us. Oneness of life depends on wholeness of heart. “One cannot have behavior characterized by integrity without the right attitude of heart and one cannot have the right attitude of heart without that being expressed outwardly.”⁷¹ One could argue that this is a kind of ‘chicken and egg’ conundrum and ask which one comes first: keeping his testimonies or seeking the LORD with the whole heart? With God both are necessary and both happen.

“Then will I sprinkle clean water upon you, and ye shall be clean: from all your filthiness, and from all your idols, will I cleanse you. A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you: and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes, and ye shall keep my judgments, and do them.”⁷²

While the external cleansing with a ‘sprinkling of clean water’ is necessary to ‘cleanse’ the ‘filthiness’ of past transgressions, it is a divinely implanted new heart, capable of being led by God’s spirit, that becomes the wellspring of future walking in God’s statutes. What then is meant by the term heart here and elsewhere in this psalm?

While the Scriptures contain no systematic treatment of the nature of human behavior in any modern psychological sense, the scriptural use of the term heart conveys much. The word translated heart is לֵב (pronounced labe) which comes from לִבָּב lebab - the physical heart. לֵב is widely used in the figurative sense for the feelings, the will and even the intellect. It can also mean the center of anything, like the heart of a matter or the heart of the sea. It speaks of the wellspring of the inner life lived in God. In the New Testament, the Greek term καρδία (pronounced kar-dee'-ah) has a similar usage. When Jesus answers the question: Master, which is the great commandment in the law; He links the role of the heart with foundational obedience to the law: “Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment.”⁷³

⁷¹ Goldingay Psalms, Vol. III p.382

⁷² Ezekiel 36:25 - 27

⁷³ Matthew 22:36-38 The term here “all thy heart” corresponds roughly to “thy whole heart” of Psalm 119:2; which is to say that the individual’s undivided cognitive, affective, and volitional abilities are all necessarily involved in their obedience to God.

Although the term heart occurs fifteen times in this psalm, the term “my whole heart” occurs only five times, and it is these that we shall examine.

- 10a With my whole heart have I sought thee:
- 34b I shall observe it (thy law) with my whole heart.
- 58a I entreated thy favor with my whole heart:
- 69b I will keep thy precepts with my whole heart.
- 145a I cried with my whole heart.

The reader can easily observe that the psalmist’s use of the term “my whole heart” involves different activities on his part and that these include: seeking (10a), paying full attention to the law (34b), petitioning the favor of the LORD (58a), keeping or remembering and meditating ⁷⁴ on the precepts (69b), and crying or urgent prayer (145a).

Seeking the LORD’s direction – The subject of what it means to seek the LORD has already been addressed in verse 2. The word gives the sense of a well-worn path to a familiar person that has been followed many times not an undiscovered path leading to a hidden treasure. The LORD is not hidden from His people, and those who seek Him do so with great regularity. The ‘pathway’ to His presence is well worn; the reason being the daily complexity of staying in the way and hence the necessity of remaining undefiled by any departure from it. What is interesting is that while the psalmist does not necessarily see himself among the blessed as yet ⁷⁵ he nevertheless seeks the LORD with his whole heart as they do.

Observing or paying full attention to the law – Paying careful attention to anything (driving a car, shopping for bargains, framing important conversations, etc.) means being aware of what we are doing at any given time and considering possible consequences of an error in judgment. This is not ‘paralysis by analysis’ but a constant, ongoing control mechanism which aligns exterior actions (steering the car/adjusting the speed, paying the price, or choosing the words, etc.) with interior goals (personal safety, economic frugality, relational harmony, etc.). And this ongoing control mechanism is an integrative force bringing the inner and outer life of the psalmist into harmonious alignment.

Petitioning the favor of the LORD – When the whole heart is committed to the service of the LORD, failure is necessarily felt with great acuteness. The greatest saints have genuinely seen themselves as the greatest sinners. A deep sense of God’s holiness is inevitably accompanied by a profound sense of personal sinfulness. It is Paul, the great

⁷⁴ The concept of “keeping” is best illustrated by the Virgin Mary’s response to the event surrounding the Savior’s birth. “And all they that heard it (*i.e. the shepherds’ testimony*) wondered at those things which were told them by the shepherds. **But Mary kept all these things, and pondered them in her heart.**

⁷⁵ Note again his question in Beth 119:9 “Wherewithal shall a young man cleanse his way?” He knows he is not yet perfect in his obedience, but one thing he has in common with the blessed is his wholehearted seeking of God. There is a similar thought in Paul’s address to the Philippian believers. “Not as though I had already attained, either were already perfect: but I follow after, if that I may apprehend that for which also I am apprehended of Christ Jesus.” Philippians 3:12

saint of God, who identifies himself with the “sinners; of whom I am chief.”⁷⁶ People who whole-heartedly feel their sinfulness before a thrice Holy God are exactly those who will just as wholeheartedly petition Him for Mercy. They that are (i.e. mistakenly believe themselves to be) whole feel no need for a physician to heal their souls.⁷⁷

Remembering and meditating on the precepts – In one sense this entire psalm may be seen as a vast expansion of the introductory part of Psalm 1. The blessed man has his delight in the law of the LORD; and in his law doth he meditate day and night. To remember and to meditate on God’s way of thinking (i.e. His precepts) is not to be distracted by the lies that the proud have forged against him or any other external circumstance. The psalmist’s whole mind is taken up with reflection on the way God has told him He thinks. On the one hand this is an impossible task because “my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith the LORD. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts.”⁷⁸ Nevertheless, the discipline of “casting down imaginations, and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ”⁷⁹ is still a valuable discipline for the thought life.

Urgent prayer – Here, again, we see the intensity of the spiritual life when the whole heart is involved. The connotation of this passage is that of a desperate person who has been lying in wait for the only person on earth who could help them. It has the intensity of a life and death matter, in which all the norms of polite social behavior are thrown to the wind. There is prayer that is half-hearted, not fully convinced of the unutterable necessity of the petition presented and there is the pleading of the woman of Canaan,⁸⁰ the cry of blind Bartimaeus,⁸¹ or the touch of the desperate “woman, which was diseased with an issue of blood twelve years.”⁸² All these are the external manifestation of a whole hearted desperation that speaks loud and clear to the heart of God, a heart that has sent His Dearest and Best to this sad place to answer all such urgent prayers.

⁷⁶ 1 Timothy 1:15 “This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save **sinners; of whom I am chief.**”

⁷⁷ Mark 2:17 When Jesus heard it, he saith unto them, They that are whole have no need of the physician, but they that are sick: I came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance.

⁷⁸ Isaiah 55:8-9

⁷⁹ 2 Corinthians 10:5

⁸⁰ Matthew 15:21-28

⁸¹ Mark 10:46-52

⁸² Matthew 9:20-22

A Godly Struggle

³ They also do no iniquity:
They walk in his ways.



This verse is the last of the three verses that introduce the “blessed” as a sort of gold-standard of godliness to which the psalmist aspires. They do no iniquity and walk in his ways while the psalmist laments “O that my ways were directed to keep thy statutes!” (Verse 5) It is not that the psalmist is jealous of the blessed. Rather, he observes something that people often miss; happiness⁸³ comes from holiness. Many might object to such an assertion based on the “holy” people that they have seen. But examples that detract from the simple interrelation of holiness and happiness offer evidence that what often passes for holiness is not holiness at all but self-righteousness devoid of any measure of love for one’s neighbor.⁸⁴ The psalmist is not mistaken in his observations. Blessed people do no iniquity but instead constantly walk in God’s ways. They are happy people! Unlike the first two verses: doing no iniquity and walking in His way are both externally observable to the morally astute viewer. They are not internal states. The psalmist does, however, make the assertion that the observation of the behavior described in verse 3 is the result of an internal condition in which the individual seeks God with his whole heart (verse 2). Having considered the nature of blessedness, the harmonious integrity of the interior and exterior life and the centrality of the heart in the entire matter, we turn to an examination of the psalmist’s two-fold observation in this verse.

Verse 3a describes behavior in a negative sense: “they do no iniquity”. Verse 3b describes behavior in a positive sense: “they walk in his ways.” These observations complement one another as necessary and sufficient conditions of the holiness that God calls people to.⁸⁵ One cannot commit an iniquitous act and still be said to be walking in God’s ways. On the other hand, walking in God’s ways precludes not only sins of

⁸³ There is, of course, a nascent definition of happiness behind this assertion. Many consider that happiness centers in the possession of material wealth, or substantial health, or (at least) the absence of trouble and pain. But, for the psalmist, having been blessed of God to be included in His covenant people, happiness clearly rests upon maximizing the harmoniousness of his already standing relationship with the LORD. Since God is immutable and holy, it is clear that such happiness for the psalmist can only be achieved by changes on the psalmist’s part leading to increased fidelity to all that God has revealed of His ways (i.e. holiness).

⁸⁴ Scripture presents a clear linkage between the love of one’s neighbor made in God’s image and the love of God. (See Leviticus 19:18, Matthew 22:37-40, Galatians 5:14 and 1 John 3:17) Self-righteous people often miss this point. God tells Israel, “I have spread out my hands all the day unto a rebellious people, which walketh in a way that was not good, after their own thoughts; ... Which say, Stand by thyself, come not near to me; for I am holier than thou. These are a smoke in my nose, a fire that burneth all the day.” (Isaiah 65:2 & 5) Self-righteous people make the mistake of believing that a right relationship with God can be maintained independently from and with no reference to the welfare of one’s fellow human being. Or, to put it another way, holiness inevitably goes hand in hand with love. And loving people are profoundly attractive people because they are more or less happy people.

⁸⁵ 1 Peter 1:13-16 “Wherefore gird up the loins of your mind, be sober, and hope to the end for the grace that is to be brought unto you at the revelation of Jesus Christ; As obedient children, not fashioning yourselves according to the former lusts in your ignorance: But as he which hath called you is holy, so be ye holy in all manner of conversation; Because it is written*, Be ye holy; for I am holy.”

(* Leviticus 20:7-8 Sanctify yourselves therefore, and be ye holy; for I am the LORD your God. And ye shall keep my statutes, and do them: I am the LORD which sanctify you.)

commission but also sins of omission. The behavior characterized in verse 3a addresses sins of commission, while the behavior characterized by verse 3b addresses sins of omission as well as commission. It is not enough to say, "Do not do to others what you would not want them to do to you." It is also necessary to say "Do unto others as you would have them do unto you."⁸⁶ It is for this reason that the Decalogue, for all its negative proscriptions ("thou shalt not..."), is fundamentally undergirded by the positive command to love God with all one's being and one's neighbor as oneself. The holiness that God calls humanity to live, is active as well as passive.

Given these two observations about holiness, we should ask about the nature of the happiness ("blissed"-ness). Clearly happiness is an emotional state that is incompatible with unhappiness. But are they mutually exclusive? That is, despite the fact that happiness and unhappiness are so very different from one another as to be incompatible, the question remains can one be happy and unhappy at the same time? If we look at the state of biological life and death, for example, they are incompatible and mutually exclusive. For one to be alive argues that one cannot be dead and vice versa. But if we look at the state of being educated and uneducated, though they are incompatible, they are not mutually exclusive. A person who has graduated high school can be said to be educated, but not in the same way as a person who has completed many degrees at the college level. Educated / uneducated describes the resulting state of an irreversible process which may be ongoing whereas life / death describes the resulting end state of an equally irreversible but totally absorbing process that occurs once for all. Dying precludes further living, whereas education does not preclude further education. If happiness, rooted as it is in holiness, is the result of a totally absorbing process that occurs irreversibly once for all, then the holiness described in verse 3 is sinless perfection.⁸⁷ But the uniform testimony of both the Old and New Testaments contradicts such a view. If sinless perfection had been possible, why would there have been a need for the extensive sacrificial system given to the children of Israel. Paul just as clearly tells us that "All have sinned and come short of the glory of God"⁸⁸ The Apostle John advises, "If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, ... If we say that we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us."⁸⁹

So, if the happiness that the psalmist seeks is rooted in a holiness that derives from an ongoing process (i.e. the process we usually call sanctification) then the psalmist is happy, but not as happy as some others he sees whose manifestly godly life (though not necessarily totally free from any sin) renders them happier than he. He is both happy

⁸⁶ Luke 6:31 "And as ye would that men should do to you, do ye also to them likewise." Matthew 7:12 "Therefore all things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them: for this is the law and the prophets."

⁸⁷ Such a view necessarily implies immutability in general and impeccability in particular and neither is true of our humanity regardless of the later entrance of sin. Man was created as a peccable being as well as mutable one, and continues so today.

⁸⁸ Romans 3:23 For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God.

⁸⁹ 1 John 1:8-10 "If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. If we say that we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us."

and unhappy. And it is his unhappiness as much as the example of more godly people that drives him to seek for ever greater blessedness. And it is to such a life of greater happiness that he aspires. But such an aspiration necessitates a struggle to leave behind the condition of partial holiness / happiness while pressing on toward ever greater holiness / happiness. It is Paul who explains the two sides of this struggle with his description of the “old man” and the “new man.”⁹⁰ The old man, enslaved by the principle of indwelling sin, is powerless to achieve the holiness the apostle desires.⁹¹ The new man, who after God is created in righteousness and true holiness, is not prone to sin at all.⁹² These two natures are fundamentally incompatible with one another, inimically so.⁹³ So, if there is a conflict, how may we describe the two sides? In terms of the underlying thesis of happiness resting on holiness, we would call the process which the psalmist seeks to pursue: sanctification. But from the standpoint of a human nature prone to sin, leaving such hostility to God behind is like putting the old self to death, hence the term mortification. Sanctification and mortification are like two sides to the same coin. What then “flips” this coin and drives this deadly struggle to a successful completion, to the blessedness so desired? In a word, it is the grace of God. And it is this grace that is sought continually throughout this psalm in its many prayers for deliverance from self and from other sinners, as well as divine favor which will enable the psalmist to achieve what he knows that he cannot do by himself.

The Secret of Happiness

4 Thou hast commanded us
To keep thy precepts diligently



The fourth verse of the first octave marks an important transition from the psalmist’s description of the supremely happy (1-3) to that of his own godly dissatisfaction and longing (5-8). They are blessed because “they do no iniquity” and “they walk in his ways” but he cries out, “O that my ways were directed to keep thy statutes!” Here in the fourth verse, however, we see both the psalmist and the blessed in the same boat, so to speak. God has given both of them the exact same command: to keep His precepts diligently. From this we may infer two simple but far reaching observations that are well supported by other scriptures: that God is no respecter of persons,⁹⁴ and that God

⁹⁰ Ephesians 4:22 -24 That ye put off concerning the former conversation the old man, which is corrupt according to the deceitful lusts; And be renewed in the spirit of your mind; And that ye put on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness.

⁹¹ Romans 7:1-25

⁹² 1 John 3:9 - 10 “Whosoever is born of God doth not commit sin; for his seed remaineth in him: and he cannot sin, because he is born of God. In this the children of God are manifest, and the children of the devil: whosoever doeth not righteousness is not of God, neither he that loveth not his brother.”

⁹³ Galatians 5:16 - 17 “This I say then, Walk in the Spirit, and ye shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh. For the flesh lusteth (*i.e. wars*) against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh: and these are contrary the one to the other: so that ye cannot do the things that ye would.”

⁹⁴ Acts 10:34-35 “Then Peter opened his mouth, and said, ‘Of a truth I perceive that God is no respecter of persons. But in every nation, he that feareth him, and worketh righteousness, is accepted with him.’”

loves all men.⁹⁵ From a human standpoint we recognize that one of the most fundamental wishes that we could have for those that we love is that they might be happy. What loving parent of a small child does not wish happiness for them? Every bride and groom hope for a happy married life on their bridal day. Every employee, on the day of their hiring, hopes that they will be happy with their new job and that their employer will be happy with their performance. The framers of the Declaration of Independence saw that governments are “instituted among men” in order “to secure” the “inalienable rights” of “all men” and that among these is “the pursuit of happiness.”⁹⁶ So, by introducing us to the “blessed” and by linking himself (and all those who would live more godly lives) in this forth verse, the psalmist hints at the reason behind the command thus set forth, namely that God desires that all people, everywhere, whom He loves should be supremely happy.⁹⁷ And this desire, lying behind the command in verse 4 is a great expression of God’s love for the blessed, the psalmist, and for us. In short, verse 4 presents us with nothing less than the secret of a happy life! And that secret is contained in a command of just four words: keep my precepts diligently. And to these we now turn.

My precepts: Of all the other words that the psalmist might have used, why did he choose God’s precepts? He did this because precepts have most to do with the interior life of the soul. Commandments, statutes, and judgments are fundamentally instructions governing actions expected of the covenant people. While it was good to reflect on their nature, they are focused on norms of action observable from an external point of view. The law (Torah) means more for the psalmist than the word law does for us. Torah is really teaching. As such meditation and striving to grasp and apply Torah is critical. Even though it involves learning, which is internal, it still should produce results observable to one outside the individual. Testimonies relate to situations and are centered on the truth. Those called to testify in legal proceedings are admonished to tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth. Without such truth, a just judgment cannot be rendered. But here, again, a testimony is about what someone observes outside of themselves or what someone tells others about what is going on inside themselves where others cannot see. Precepts, on the other hand, have

⁹⁵ John 3:16 For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life. Acts 17:29-31 Forasmuch then as we are the offspring of God, we ought not to think that the Godhead is like unto gold, or silver, or stone, graven by art and man’s device. And the times of this ignorance God winked at; but now commandeth all men every where to repent: Because he hath appointed a day, in the which he will judge the world in righteousness by that man whom he hath ordained; whereof he hath given assurance unto all men, in that he hath raised him from the dead. (The end of Paul’s address to the Athenians on Mars hill)

⁹⁶ ... but not necessarily the guarantor of that happiness. In the end, we are responsible for our own happiness and should not be looking to another to provide it for us. And this verse implies much the same thing. Whether in parenting, marriage, employment or governance; relationships take work on our part to be successful in achieving happiness. And where both parties work earnestly and well together, happiness ensues. The psalmist wants to do his part and constantly pleads for God to do His (instruct, guide, enlighten, deliver, save, etc.). Prayer is thus an integral part in achieving happiness.

⁹⁷ Again we note that the happiness as defined here centers not in possession of material or immaterial things, but in having a right relationship with God and one’s neighbor who is made in the image of God. In this sense, the psalmist is already blessed (בָּרַךְ barak- blessed as a benefit) in having a covenantal relationship with God. Rather he desires to be blessed (אֵשֶׁר 'eshet – happy) in that relationship being harmonious. And to that end, both he and the blessed are constantly striving.

everything to do with the interior life; the life of the heart; the use of our mind. In formulating legal judgments and moral directions, the dictates of the law must be understood. A good judgment is a wise judgment, because the goal of a just decision is rooted in a desire for good consequences for those involved. And good consequences are the focus of wisdom. If I do this as opposed to that, what will the consequences be? A mind trained to discern subtle differences between good and evil consequences in subtle presenting cases⁹⁸ is the very essence of wisdom. It is this love of wisdom (phileo-sophia or philosophy), that begets good judgments, because legal and moral wisdom takes account of the consequences of subtle ramifications of the law. But good judgments also take account of the inner workings of the people involved. Knowledge of the soul (i.e. being knowledgeable in soul-doctrine or psyche-ology) is also needed. For that reason, legal and moral precepts draw from both disciplines. A good judge understands both the subtleties of people and the subtleties of the law. And it is to such a state of mind that this command summons us. In short, relational harmony with God and our fellow man requires that we understand what is the right (and the loving) thing to do in any given situation. The term “thy precepts” is more concerned with how we think than any of the other terms the psalmist uses.⁹⁹

Keep: The word translated to keep is שָׁמַר shamar, a primitive root meaning properly, to hedge about (as with thorns) that is to guard, to protect, to attend to. The word implies a great deal. It was first used when God gave humanity the stewardship of this world. “And the LORD God took the man, and put him into the Garden of Eden to dress it and to keep it.”¹⁰⁰ When man sinned, God “drove out the man; and he placed at the east of the garden of Eden, Cherubim, and a flaming sword which turned every way, to keep the way of the tree of life.”¹⁰¹ The term implies to manage, to protect, to defend, and to preserve. We commonly use the term in the sense of keeping a house. But all of these concepts include watchfulness or taking responsive action based on observation. If we view the soul as a garden and its thoughts as fruit, then the term to “keep thy precepts” equates roughly taking proper care of the use of our interior faculties; what we think, what we feel, and above all what we do.¹⁰² The apostle Paul summarizes this

⁹⁸ A key differentiation between spiritual maturity and immaturity is given in Hebrews 5:13 – 14. “For every one that useth milk is unskillful in the word of righteousness: for he is a babe. But strong meat belongeth to them that are of full age, even those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil.” The outcome of unwise choices is summarized in Proverbs Pr 14:12 and 16:25. “There is a way which seemeth right unto a man, but the end thereof are the ways of death.”

⁹⁹ Some modern theories of moral development point in the same direction: “According to Kohlberg’s theory of moral development seven to ten year-old children reason on the ‘preconventional level’ at which they defer to adult authority and obey rules based only on expectations of punishment and reward. ... Beginning at age ten, children move to the ‘conventional level’ (conventional in the societal sense), when their behavior is guided by other people and a desire to conform. ... Sometime during adolescence, according to Kohlberg, a few people develop beyond the conventional level to the third and highest level which is called ‘post-conventional morality.’ This third level requires the individual to formulate abstract moral principles and to act on them to satisfy his own conscience rather than to gain approval of others.” Quoted from The Sociopath Next Door by Martha Stout, ph.d. Page 174, ISBN - 13: 978-1-60671-131-6 For the purposes of this note, the “abstract moral principles” equate roughly to “precepts”.

¹⁰⁰ Genesis 2:15

¹⁰¹ Genesis 3:24

¹⁰² Deuteronomy 4:7-9 “For what nation is there so great, who hath God so nigh unto them, as the LORD our God is in all things that we call upon him for? And what nation is there so great, that hath statutes and judgments so righteous as all this law, which I set

kind of interior discipline at least in its negative aspects, “Casting down imaginations, and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ.”¹⁰³

Diligently: But the command in verse 4 goes far beyond just taking care to develop and maintain the interior life. The little modifier “diligently” sets the tone of the activity. We are to keep God’s precepts diligently. In English, the term diligence describes a virtue that involves watchfulness or attention to details. A diligent person observes details because a discerning spirit knows the significance that small differences (i.e. the difference between good and evil already cited) can have with respect to long term consequences (wisdom). But a diligent person also acts quickly. Ever vigilant and discerning, the moment things begin to go in a wrong direction, a diligent person will take quick corrective action. The question then arises, why the speed of response? Speed of action is rooted in the affections which, of all the soul’s aspects, are the most instantaneous. Drop a five-dollar bill in the park and see how fast the observant dive at it. Drop breadcrumbs in a pond full of hungry ducks and see how quickly they congregate. Fervent desire drives the will with great force. It is here that the English term “diligence” comes closest to the Hebrew word it translates. מְאִדָּה meh-ode’ means, properly, vehemence or vehemently. By implication it means wholly or speedily. It is also used with other words as an intensive which suggests that which exceeds bounds. So, when God creates the world, He finds it exceedingly good. When Cain sees that his offering is not accepted but Abel’s is he becomes exceedingly angry. When the flood arises in Noah’s day, the waters became exceedingly great. The diligence, enjoined by this command, is one in which the celerity and vehemence of its performance should exceed all bounds. In short happiness (achieving and maintaining a harmonious relationship with God and man) lies in achieving a moral excellence based on an active interior spiritual life that is exceedingly well managed and driven by the greatest of desires for God. It is this concept which is nascent when the psalmist says that the blessed seek God with their whole heart.

Affection and Direction



⁵ O that my ways were directed
To keep thy statutes!

⁶ Then shall I not be ashamed,
When I have respect unto all thy commandments.



before you this day? Only take heed to thyself, and keep thy soul diligently, lest thou forget the things which thine eyes have seen, and lest they depart from thy heart all the days of thy life: but teach them thy sons, and thy sons’ sons”

¹⁰³ 2 Corinthians 10:5

Part of a harmonious relationship with God involves the appropriateness of the affective state of the heart with regard to our perception of the external realities of our life. Where the perception of our situational reality accords well with actuality, it is possible for the response of our affective state to be appropriate.¹⁰⁴ As the psalmist begins the personal elements of this long psalm, it is helpful to consider the psalmist's affective state is at this point and why his response is a harbinger of a harmonious relationship with God for the rest of his life. There are at least three emotions readily observable: an ardent desire for God, a feeling of personal inadequacy, and shame over past failures.

Desire: The translators have done well with the set: "O...!" The psalmist has a desire not crying out to obtain some abstract way of life, but for blessedness in harmony with God, Himself. The cry marks him as a man after God's own heart.¹⁰⁵

Inadequacy: There is a clear link between verses 4 and 5

Thou hast commanded us to keep thy precepts diligently.
O that my ways were directed (קֹוֹן koon) to keep thy statutes!

The psalmist knows that if a person's heart keeps the LORD'S precepts diligently, then his ways will be directed to keep His statutes. The interior life drives the exterior life, but not without struggle. The blessed "seek Him with their whole heart" (2b) but so does the psalmist (10)¹⁰⁶ This verse hints that the psalmist has had a long history of trying and failing not unlike Paul's life as a Pharisee in Romans 7. The psalmist knows from hard experience what Jeremiah tells us: "the way of man is not in himself: it is not in man that walketh to direct (קֹוֹן koon) his steps."¹⁰⁷ He also knows that "The steps of a good man are ordered by the LORD: and he delighteth in his way. Though he falls, he shall not be utterly cast down: for the LORD upholdeth him with his hand."¹⁰⁸

Shame: What we do not see in this verse is the least hint of problem denial or rationalization to explain his failure to "keep thy statutes." Clearly the psalmist acknowledges the reality that for all his whole-hearted seeking of the LORD, he has from time to time wandered from God's commandments. And that wandering has brought forth another affective response to moral failure: shame:

¹⁰⁴ What I am saying is this: What we feel is important. It is important because our emotions are the messengers that can tell us about the presence of critical issues of our lives. But emotions can also squawk about trifles that have no reality. The wife who gets upset about her husband not putting the cap back on the toothpaste after he uses it is a world away from the wife who gets upset because she has just learned that her husband has had an affair with another woman. Both are upset, but only one is connected to the reality of what is important in life. The 'toothpaste' wife is out of contact with reality, the jilted wife is not. The jilted wife's upset is totally appropriate; the toothpaste wife's upset is not.

¹⁰⁵ 1 Samuel 13:13 - 14 "And Samuel said to Saul, Thou hast done foolishly: thou hast not kept the commandment of the LORD thy God, which he commanded thee: for now would the LORD have established thy kingdom upon Israel for ever. But now thy kingdom shall not continue: the LORD hath sought him a man after his own heart, and the LORD hath commanded him to be captain over his people, because thou hast not kept that which the LORD commanded thee." God sought David and knew that David would seek Him. There was to be a 'heart to heart' relationship unlike the relationship with Saul.

¹⁰⁶ Psalm 119:10 "With my whole heart have I sought thee: O let me not wander from thy commandments."

¹⁰⁷ Jeremiah 10:23

¹⁰⁸ Psalm 37:23-24

Then shall I not be ashamed,
When I have respect unto all thy commandments.

Commandments and Statutes are the external (general and specific) measures of the successful application of internal moral precepts to real situations in the psalmist's everyday life. The proper working of the whole process of the harmonizing the inner and outer life, the life of feeling and thinking with the life of action, become the *sine qua non* of the psalmist's life in God. But this process doesn't always work flawlessly. He makes mistakes. He is guilty of errors in judgment. Perhaps he sees the situation not as it actually is but as he wants it to be. He needs God's testimony. He needs God's direction. He needs God.

What then is the psalmist (and are we) to do? "Trust in the LORD with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding. In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct (כִּי יִנְּוּךָ koon) thy paths."¹⁰⁹ The psalmist's ardent desire for God, his realization of personal inadequacy, and his shame over past failures unite in a powerful ambivalence that motivate the psalmist's prayer of verse 5 and 6. Nor is his prayer without hope. God, seeing this situation not only in the psalmist but also in us, has promised an effective solution.

"Then will I sprinkle clean water upon you, and ye shall be clean: from all your filthiness, and from all your idols, will I cleanse you. A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you: and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you an heart of flesh. And I will put my spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes, and ye shall keep my judgments, and do them."¹¹⁰

The promised solution clearly looks forward. Not to some transformational miracle devoid of humanity; rather it looks forward to the result of the perfect work of God's Son, Jesus, who will save His people from their sins"¹¹¹

Hope and Fear

⁵ O that my ways were directed
To keep thy statutes!

⁶ Then shall I not be ashamed,
When I have respect unto all thy commandments

⁷ I will praise thee with uprightness of heart,
When I shall have learned thy righteous judgments

⁸ I will keep thy statutes
O forsake me not utterly



¹⁰⁹ Proverbs 3:5 - 6

¹¹⁰ Ezekiel 36:25 - 27

¹¹¹ Matthew 1:21 And she shall bring forth a son, and thou shalt call his name JESUS: for he shall save his people from their sins.

In the previous section we considered the threefold affective state of the psalmist (5 and 6a), an ardent desire for God, a feeling of personal inadequacy, and shame over past failures. But there are two additional emotions suggested in these last three verses that seem a most unlikely pair at first glance: hope and fear. Indeed, the ambivalence suggests an emotional struggle to achieve a rest in hope of triumph in godliness (6 to 8a) over the turmoil of a fear of being forsaken by God upon Whom the psalmist knows he utterly depends (8b).

Hope: On the one hand, the psalmist twice indicates that he anticipates a change for the better:

When I have respect unto all thy commandments
⁷ I will praise thee with uprightness of heart,
When I shall have learned thy righteous judgments
⁸ I will keep thy statutes

Fear: On the other hand, the psalmist's only prayer in this octave is one rooted in fear: "O forsake me not utterly." We might ask why the emotional struggle should be in the first place and how it will be eventually resolved, if ever.

Fear vs. Faith - A choice: it is important to recognize that, spiritually speaking, faith is not the absence of fear. Confronted with human hostility, David exclaims: "What time I am afraid, I will trust in thee."¹¹² Fear and faith go hand in hand. In psalm 56, the fear of man (the Philistines) and his faith in God are competing for control of David's will. The psalmist recognizes this emotional conflict as the presenting symptom of a critical choice for the basis of his actions. In the psalm, David makes his choice clear: "In God I have put my trust; I will not fear what flesh can do unto me." Of course, the circumstances of psalm 56 are somewhat different than Psalm 119:5-8. In psalm 56 it was fear of man vs. trust in God. Here the psalmist vacillates between fear of God's abandonment (8b) and hope for God's help (6b-8a). His fear and faith are both centered in God and in the psalmist's profound awareness of his utter dependency upon God. In 5a the psalmist is looking for a spiritual director (an **ℵ** – Aleph or leader). Had he, self-confidently, considered himself to his own spiritual director; the psalmist would have been hopeful but not fearful. He would also have been totally self-deceived. Had he been self-confident, 5–6a would have read differently.

¹¹² Psalm 56:1- 4 is (as the title tells us) "a poem by David, when the Philistines seized him in Gath."

Be merciful unto me, O God: for man would swallow me up;
He fighting daily oppresseth me.
Mine enemies would daily swallow me up:
For they be many that fight against me, O thou most High.
What time I am afraid,
I will trust in thee.
In God I will praise his word,
In God I have put my trust;
I will not fear
What flesh can do unto me.

The Language of Dependency

O that my ways were directed
To keep thy statutes!
6 Then shall I not be ashamed.

The Language of Self Confidence

When my ways are directed
To keep thy statutes,
6 I shall not be ashamed.

Nor would the octave have any reason to end in a prayer as it does. The two-fold construct: “when I ... I will” reflect the psalmist’s realization of God’s timing. His praise (7a) and his complete obedience (8a) both rest upon not only God’s intervention (so that the psalmist has “respect unto all thy commandments” and that the psalmist has “learned thy righteous judgments) but also on God’s timing (“when ... when”). And it is the timing of God’s intervention that worries the psalmist. What if God never takes action? What if God simply walks away from the psalmist in his dire need for help and forsakes him? All this brings us to a second realization about the spiritual life – the role of time.

Our formation and God’s timing: Just as silence is one of the most difficult modes of communication to interpret, so apparent inactivity is one of the most difficult of God’s actions to comprehend. Over and over again in the psalms the psalmist complains of God’s apparent inactivity.¹¹³ Just why is such delay needful? Delay has to do with the divinely appointed relationship between responsive faith and answering grace.¹¹⁴ As a rule, the scriptures make clear that God, in His patience waits for the repentance of the individual that accompanies faith. “therefore will the LORD wait, that he may be gracious unto you, and therefore will he be exalted, that he may have mercy upon you.”¹¹⁵ While we may not know exactly what it is that God is doing in the soul of the psalmist (or ours) that appears to us as His patient waiting, such waiting can give rise to the fear that God has forsaken us. We may say with certainty, however, that divine abandonment is not the case with those whom God calls, because God has promised “I

¹¹³ Psalm 10:1 Why standest thou afar off, O LORD? Why hidest thou thyself in times of trouble? Psalm 22:1 My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me? Why art thou so far from helping me, and from the words of my roaring? Psalm 42:9 I will say unto God my rock, Why hast thou forgotten me? Psalm 43:2 For thou art the God of my strength: why dost thou cast me off? Psalm 44:23 Awake, why sleepest thou, O Lord? Arise, cast us not off forever. Psalm 74:1 O God, why hast thou cast us off forever? Why doth thine anger smoke against the sheep of thy pasture? Psalm 74:11 Why withdrawest thou thy hand, even thy right hand? Pluck it out of thy bosom. Psalm 80:12 Why hast thou then broken down her hedges, so that all they which pass by the way do pluck her? Psalm 88:14 LORD, why castest thou off my soul? Why hidest thou thy face from me?

¹¹⁴ The classic expression of the dependency of the one (grace) on the other (faith) is given in Ephesians 2:8-9 “For by grace are ye saved through faith, and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast.”

¹¹⁵ The necessity of repentance that accompanies faith is manifest in Isaiah 30:15-18 “For thus saith the Lord GOD, the Holy One of Israel; ‘In returning and rest shall ye be saved; in quietness and in confidence shall be your strength: and ye would not. But ye said, No; for we will flee upon horses; therefore shall ye flee: and, we will ride upon the swift; therefore shall they that pursue you be swift. One thousand shall flee at the rebuke of one; at the rebuke of five shall ye flee: till ye be left as a beacon upon the top of a mountain, and as an ensign on an hill. And therefore will the LORD wait, that he may be gracious unto you, and therefore will he be exalted, that he may have mercy upon you: for the LORD is a God of judgment: blessed are all they that wait for him.’” In other words, Israel had refused God’s gracious invitation to return to Himself in a time of trouble and to rest in Him. Instead they refused and said “we will not, but we will flee.” So God let them have the consequences of their choice if only to encourage their eventual repentance. But all that takes time. So God explained that “therefore will the LORD wait, that he may be gracious unto you, and therefore will he be exalted, that he may have mercy upon you ...”

will never leave thee, nor forsake thee.”¹¹⁶ So the only answer that the psalmist has (and that we have) is the prayer of faith (8b) which is a pendant with verse (5a). “O that my ways were directed to keep thy statutes! ... O forsake me not utterly!”

Toward a Perfect Love

⁵ O that my ways were directed
To keep thy statutes!

...

^{8b} O forsake me not utterly!



Before we leave this octave, there is one more thing to consider: the nature of love as an interpreter of our prayers. As mentioned in the previous lesson, the prayer of faith in verse 8b is a pendant to the prayer in verse 5. The first prayer is motivated by desire, not for mere obedience but for a more intimate and harmonious relationship with God, Whom the psalmist knows he is totally dependent on. As noted in the lesson on prayer (on psalm 119:1-3): “Prayer also requires love which focuses on human need whether our own or that of another whom we love. And love, whether the proper love of our self or of another, is at once the basis of prayer and of obedience.¹¹⁷ Love which underlies true and effectual prayer also requires action on our part, even if the only action that we have left to us is to pray. It is the compliment and evidence of faith.¹¹⁸ Faith works by love in doing what it can and looking to God to do what it cannot do.”

But the last prayer (8b) is motivated by fear: “O forsake me not utterly!” These are not separate prayers uttered at different times or under different circumstances. They occur in the same moment. These prayers are like the two sides of the same coin. How then can fear of God’s abandonment co-exist with an ardent love for God? If we take time to examine our experience, the answer is obvious: that which we love the most is also that which we fear the most to lose. Fear and love go hand in hand. Every mother who worries about the safety of her children when she is not near to protect them from harm knows this. Every student who ever struggled to succeed in college studies knows how real the fear of failure is. Indeed, the fear of loss is an integral part of the motivation of love. One of the proofs of a sane mind is the fear of the loss of sanity. One of the fears

¹¹⁶ Hebrews 13:5-6 Let your conversation be without covetousness; and be content with such things as ye have: for he hath said, I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee. So that we may boldly say, The Lord is my helper, and I will not fear what man shall do unto me.

¹¹⁷ Deuteronomy 11:1 “Therefore thou shalt love the LORD thy God, and keep his charge, and his statutes, and his judgments, and his commandments, always.”

Matthew 22:37-40 Jesus said unto him, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself. On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets.

¹¹⁸ Galatians 5:6 For in Jesus Christ neither circumcision availeth any thing, nor uncircumcision; (i.e. externalism or external conformity) but faith which worketh by love (i.e. true obedience).

nascent in the desire for the praise of men is the fear of public humiliation. I leave it to the reader to supply further examples of this common human experience.

But fear is not ultimately compatible with love. As the apostle John tells us:

“¹⁶We know and have believed the love which God has for us. God is love, and he who remains in love remains in God, and God remains in him. ¹⁷In this love has been made perfect among us, that we may have boldness in the Day of Judgment because as he is, even so are we in this world. ¹⁸There is no fear in love; but perfect love casts out fear, because fear has punishment. He who fears is not made perfect in love. ¹⁹We love Him, because he first loved us.”¹¹⁹

What John is saying here is this: God, in loving us first (19), has enabled us to know and believe or trust that love (16a). The fact that God loves us further proves John’s earlier assertion that God is love (16b). Because God is love and has loved us first, if we remain in God’s love we remain in God (16c). If we remain in God, then God’s love is made perfect (i.e. brought to maturity in us). If God’s love is fully developed in us, then we may have “boldness” (i.e. confidence of not being condemned) in the Day of Judgment because of our inherent likeness with Jesus. We love unselfishly and sacrificially as He did (17). But if we continue to fear being punished on the Day of Judgment, this is an evidence that we are not yet made perfect (not sinless perfection but spiritually mature) in love (18c) because there is ultimately no fear in love that perfect (18b). Perfect love does not have fear of punishment. (18a) John is not saying that those not yet made perfect in God’s love are going to be judged and punished. What he is saying is that love coupled with fear is evidence that the individual has some growing to maturity (perfection) to do. Immature, human, love is marked by fear which is a kind of torment. But the love that God would have in our hearts is free from all such fear. The key descriptor in John’s discourse here is not love, but perfect or mature.

There are of course two ways that we can look at this situation: to dread the fear that we find in our love while we lament our immaturity or to seek out and rejoice in such fear when we find it in ourselves (as the psalmist utters in verse 8b) because it is an indication of an area in our lives where growth is not only desirable but possible. It is a beneficial exercise to reflect not only on that which we love but on the thing, that makes us afraid. Such an exercise is not intended to cause us to immolate ourselves in a climate of endless fears. Rather it points us to areas where we should earnestly desire to grow and be rid of such fear. To return to David’s saying in the last lesson: “What time I am afraid, I will trust in thee.”¹²⁰ Our fears, rightly understood, can be the signposts pointing us to further growth in Jesus Christ. Smallness of faith and immature love seem to go hand in hand in the spiritual life, but Jesus never rejects us for either. When we are afraid and cry out for him to save us, He may admonish us, as he did Peter: “O thou of little faith,

¹¹⁹ 1 John 4:16 – 19

¹²⁰ Psalm 56:3

wherefore didst thou doubt?"¹²¹ Nevertheless, He saved Peter and we may confidently expect similar faithful deliverance. We do well to ponder how to answer our Lord's question to Peter. Perhaps the answer of the father of the child taken with a destructive spirit is the best that we can do, "Lord, I believe; help thou mine unbelief."¹²²

¹²¹ Matthew 14:28-31 And Peter answered him and said, Lord, if it be thou, bid me come unto thee on the water. And he said, Come. And when Peter was come down out of the ship, he walked on the water, to go to Jesus. But when he saw the wind boisterous, he was afraid; and beginning to sink, he cried, saying, Lord, save me. And immediately Jesus stretched forth his hand, and caught him, and said unto him, O thou of little faith, wherefore didst thou doubt?

¹²² See the story in Mark 9:14 – 29. The quote comes from Mark 9:24 "And straightway the father of the child cried out, and said with tears, Lord, I believe; help thou mine unbelief."

ב (BETH)

☞ *The Great Question* ☞

⁹ Wherewithal shall a young man cleanse his way?
By taking heed thereto according to thy word

☞ *The Psalmist's Prayer* ☞

¹⁰ With my whole heart have I sought thee
O let me not wander from thy commandments
¹¹ Thy word have I hid in mine heart,
That I might not sin against thee
¹² Blessed art thou, O LORD
Teach me thy statutes
¹³ With my lips have I declared
All the judgments of thy mouth
¹⁴ I have rejoiced in the way of thy testimonies,
As much as in all riches

☞ *The Psalmist's Promise* ☞

¹⁵ I will meditate in thy precepts,
And have respect unto thy ways
¹⁶ I will delight myself in thy statutes
I will not forget thy word

☞

ב – **Beth** means a house or a dwelling. The Jew made much of the Temple. It was the center of corporate spiritual life. It was here that God met with His people. It was the “house of God” Beth-El. The view of the temple as the exclusive meeting place of God with his people, is paralleled by the idea that the heart can also be a true meeting place with God for the individual. Thus, the question raised by this single letter word, Beth, is “How can I become the house of God (Beth-El)? How can I be like the temple where God meets with Israel? These verses focus on the heart and the fullness of that heart of which both the mouth and the feet speak.

But who can make so bold a claim as to be the very house of God, the temple of the Holy Spirit? Our Lord Jesus warns the Pharisees, “Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up.”¹²³ Clearly, He is speaking of His body not a building made with hands. The psalmist’s desire to be Beth-El, anticipates the answer of our Lord Jesus and, as a result of His work on the cross, the effects of which are now applied to us as explained by the Apostle Paul. “Know ye not that ye are the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you?”¹²⁴ What the law could not achieve for the psalmist in

¹²³ John 2:19-21

¹²⁴ 1 Corinthians 3:16

that it was weak through the flesh, has now been done for us by the grace of God through the sacrifice of our Lord Jesus Christ.¹²⁵

The psalmist knows that his desire to be walking with God in the way is equivalent to becoming a Beth-el, a house where God will meet with him. And that is supremely a heart matter. He longs to praise God aright with “with uprightness of heart” (verse 7a). But he knows that above all the holiness of God requires that those who serve Him must be undefiled. The blessed are undefiled in the way (verse 1a) because they do no iniquity (verse 3a). But the psalmist also knows that this is not the case with him. He is a young man and the sins, errors, and follies of his youth have brought defilement. So, he begins this section with the central question. “Wherewithal shall a young man cleanse his way?” The immediate answer is to “take heed according to thy word.” In other words, to pay attention to everything God says: His law, His testimonies, His ways, His precepts, His statutes, His commandments, and His judgments. But how is one to actually do this? The psalmist’s answer reveals that he is no mere ceremonialist. There is no mention here of sacrifice or sin offering. Instead he speaks twice (verses 9 and 10) of his heart. He, like the blessed in verse 2b, has sought God with his whole heart and he has hid God’s word in his heart. In the central section (verses 10 through 14) he makes four assertions about his actions in the past. I have sought you with my whole heart (verse 10). I have hidden your word in my heart (verse 11). I have declared all your judgments with my lips (verse 12). I have rejoiced in the way you have told me the truth about things as much as people rejoice in money (verse 14). The seeking of God and the hiding of His every word are both heart related. The declaring of all God’s judgments and the rejoicing in the way of His testimonies both involve verbal articulation. So, in these verses, we have the past preparations of the heart and the answer of the tongue.¹²⁶ But in the middle of this spiritual history, there is the two-part plea: “O let me not wander from thy commandments ... (and) Blessed LORD, teach me thy statutes.”

The last section of this octave concludes with four-fold promise: I will meditate in thy precepts, (I will) have respect unto thy ways; I will delight myself in thy statutes; and I will not forget thy word. The availability of the commandments (from which he must not wander) and the statutes that derive from them (which he prays to learn) are foundational to fulfilling his promise to meditate in thy precepts. That is the psalmist wants to occupy his mind in understanding how the statutes flow from the commands and how these both apply to the myriad life experiences he will have along the way. It is only a delight in the statutes and a real respect for God’s way that can support the

¹²⁵ Romans 8:3-4 For what the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh, God sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh: That the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit.

¹²⁶ Proverbs 16:1 The preparations of the heart in man, and the answer of the tongue, is from the LORD.

labor involved in this constant perceptual meditation¹²⁷ and the constant remembrance of every word of God that can assure the psalmist that he will continue as the blessed of verse 1 do who walk undefiled in the way and who do no iniquity.

In other words, the whole process of cleansing his way is centered on getting it right each step of the way. He wants take heed to every word of God (:9b), to seek the LORD with his whole heart (:10a); internalize every word of God (:11); articulate every righteous judgment of God (:13); rejoice in the truth that God has told him (God's testimonies :14); meditate on the application of the commands and their dependant statutes (15a); respect the way of God (:15b); delight in His statutes (:16a); and not forget a single word of God (:16b). That is a very ambitious plan indeed! And to this end he prays that God would not let him wander from the commandments but teach him His statutes. But the way from the commandments to the statutes is a long 'pilgrimage' indeed and to enter on that way will require support for the trials along the way. Who will support the psalmist's pilgrimage? He needs a helper, a spiritual burden bearer. And to that need he turns in the next octave.

Connectedness



¹ Blessed are the undefiled in the way

...

⁵ O that my ways were directed to keep thy statutes!

...

^{8b} ... O forsake me not utterly.



⁹ Wherewithal shall a young man cleanse his way?

By taking heed thereto according to thy word



While the structure of this psalm tends to focus our attention on the individual octaves as almost stand-alone compositions, we must not lose sight of inter-octave connectedness. For example, the first octave begins with a bold statement about the individuals whom the psalmist styles "blessed." Their blessedness involves, in part walking undefiled in the way. In verse 5 we have the nascent assessment of the psalmist's spiritual state seen in contradistinction to the blessed. My ways do not keep thy statutes and because of this I am defiled. But verse 5 also presents us his great desire or longing to be blessed. "O that my ways were directed to keep thy statutes!" Concomitant with his assessment of defilement and his longing for blessing, we find his greatest fear articulated in his prayer (8b): "O forsake me not utterly." We might say

¹²⁷ Psalm 1:1 -2 Blessed is the man that walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor standeth in the way of sinners, nor sitteth in the seat of the scornful. But his delight is in the law of the LORD; and in his law doth he meditate day and night.

that his fear of being forsaken by Holy God (which would be a very real curse indeed) is rooted in his sense of defilement because of his personal failure to obey God's statutes. Given all this, the question raised in verse 9a becomes obvious. "Wherewithal shall a young man cleanse his way?"

In a more general sense, the interleaving of the first two octaves sets the direction for the entire psalm. This psalm is not about the nation of Israel as they relate to God, but the individual's relationship with the LORD. It reflects the central realization that in all spirituality, true relationship with God is first and foremost on the individual level. This assertion, however, raises the very important question: what about the community of faith? It is clear that such a community is not out of the psalmist's view. After all, he began the psalm with the description of the blessed that walk in the way undefiled. And it is just as clear that he wants to be in their number "when the saints go marching in." But the community of the righteous is not the principal focus. God is. Community, fellowship with other righteous people, is rather an outgrowth of fellowship with God. Given that focus, the psalmist's answer to the critical question of cleansing as found in 9b ("By taking heed thereto according to thy word" i.e. by paying attention to his way¹²⁸ as seen in the light of God's statutes) is an intensely personal answer. He is saying, in effect, that the community of the faithful cannot live my life for me. I must take responsibility for my own actions. I must take responsibility for the way that I have been walking in life. The fact that his reference to the individual's way has gone from personal ("my ways"(v.5)) to general ("his way"(v.9a)) indicates that the answer, though personal, is really general for all people. As we move from Aleph to Beth, we have gone from a specific and personal case to a general but equally personal exploration of just how does a defiled human get right with God?

To the Christian, such an answer seems to fly in the face of the doctrine that the just shall live by faith as found in both her Old and New Testament.¹²⁹ It is true, that the just shall live by faith (i.e. that sinful man is justified or brought into a right relationship with God through faith in God's promises as was Abraham) and that "that no man is justified by the law in the sight of God." But the psalmist is not talking here about establishing a relationship with God, rather maintaining one. He is not dealing with justification but with sanctification. And his view of sanctification is not just as an event in which the individual is forensically and juridically declared holy (i.e. the imputation of righteousness which is also true) but as a process in which the individual

¹²⁸ The word "thereto" is an ellipsis referring back to the phrase "his way".

¹²⁹ **Genesis 15:6** And he (Abraham) believed in the LORD; and he counted it to him for righteousness.

Romans 1:17, 4:3 "For therein is the righteousness of God revealed from faith to faith: as it is written, 'The just shall live by faith.' ... For what saith the scripture? 'Abraham believed God, and it was counted unto him for righteousness.'"

Galatians 3:6, 11 "Even as Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness. ... But that no man is justified by the law in the sight of God, it is evident: for the just shall live by faith."

Hebrews 10:38 "Now the just shall live by faith: but if any man draw back, my soul shall have no pleasure in him."

James 2:23 "And the scripture was fulfilled which saith, 'Abraham believed God, and it was imputed unto him for righteousness': and he was called the Friend of God."

increasingly moves in ways more pleasing to God. That he has a relationship with God is evident in His plea of verse 8b (“O forsake me not utterly”) which suggests that the psalmist of **8** and the young man of **9** both have an ongoing relationship with God, Who has been accompanying them along their pathways of life (i.e. has not forsaken them yet despite their failures). This is further evidenced by his possession of “thy word” (9b) which is already in his possession as God’s gift that he feels the need to take greater heed to. The righteous do this. He and the young man have not. Their paths have been allowed to drift away from God’s way by their failure to observe His just statutes. They have drifted away from Him and so they plead that He should not forsake them as they have just forsaken Him. Here again, if their relationship had been founded on a contract, there would be no such hope. The psalmist’s departure from the least of God’s statutes would be a breach of contract rendering it null and void. But in a covenant, God, Who is not obligated by reason of His Holiness to forsake the defiled sinner, has a choice. And to influence that choice the psalmist pleads with the assertion that he will pay greater attention to those areas wherein he has strayed. That God’s holiness should not require the eternal damnation of the sinner is good news both for the psalmist and for us. We must look elsewhere, however, as to why the holiness of God does not constrain Him to forsake the erring and sinful psalmist. The covenant looks forward to the Cross of Jesus Christ as surety for fulfillment of all its promises and patience.

Purification by the Word

⁹Wherewithal shall a young man cleanse his way?
By taking heed thereto¹³⁰ according to thy word



The overarching attribute of God that is of supreme importance to sinful and condemned man is His holiness. It is this attribute that interpenetrates and modifies all others. His love, His omniscience, and His omnipotence are all Holy. And holy is what sinful man is not. Nevertheless holiness, insofar as it is possible for humankind, is the very manner of being to which God calls all people: whether in the Old Testament (“Sanctify yourselves therefore, and be ye holy: for I am the LORD your God”¹³¹) or the New Testament (“But as he which hath called you is holy, so be ye holy in all manner of conversation; because it is written, Be ye holy; for I am holy”¹³²). The process by which holiness is engendered in human experience is called sanctification. And sanctification typically has two aspects, the first of which is found in this verse: purification or

¹³⁰ The word “thereto” in 9b clearly is an elliptical reference to “his way” of verse 9a. What the psalmist is saying here is that the means to purify one’s defiled way is already at hand: God’s word. Taking heed to one’s path, then involves the application of (to take heed to or pay close attention to) what God has already said about the way we live our lives.

¹³¹ Leviticus 20:7. See also Leviticus 11:45 “For I am the LORD that bringeth you up out of the land of Egypt, to be your God: ye shall therefore be holy, for I am holy.”

¹³² 1 Peter 1:15-16

cleansing from sin. The second aspect, separation, is also present in the psalm but elsewhere.¹³³ Earlier we considered God's promise to provide purification for His covenant people. "Then will I sprinkle clean water upon you, and ye shall be clean: from all your filthiness, and from all your idols, will I cleanse you."¹³⁴ But cleansing is not a one-sided affair. It involves the willing and active participation of the person being sanctified as well. Their participation is an evidence of the hope that they have of seeing God. Hence the Apostle John observes that "every man that hath this hope in him purifieth himself, even as he is pure."¹³⁵

As we look at the question in verse 9a (Wherewithal shall a young man cleanse his way?), we realize that the psalmist is asking a valid question that sets the stage for his pursuit of the supreme happiness (blessedness) that he alluded to in the opening verses: "Blessed are the undefiled in the way, who walk in the law of the LORD. ... they walk in his ways." But the question is also rhetorical. The psalmist quickly answers his question in verse 9b ("By taking heed thereto according to thy word"). By saying this, the psalmist is not failing to recognize God's centrality in the business of sanctification. Rather he is acknowledging his own necessary role in that process. Here we see the interplay of hope and faith: hope that God will redeem His verbal promise of purification and faith as expressed in the active attention that the individual pays to their way of living according to the word of God. In either case, the instrumentality of the word is central. That instrumentality is emphasized by Jesus' teaching to His disciples, "Now ye are clean through the word which I have spoken unto you."¹³⁶ But the instrumentality is the same whether viewed from the point of human responsibility or from the point of God's merciful kindness.¹³⁷

But why lay such stress on cleansing of one's way? Remember that the letter for this octave is ב – Beth, which means house. The several references to the heart both in this octave and the first (2b, 10a, 11a) suggest the idea that it is possible for the human heart to become Beth-El, the house of God; the special meeting place where the individual can meet and commune with God. This possibility is also suggested in the passage cited in Ezekiel. "A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you: and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you an heart of flesh. And I will put my spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes, and ye shall

¹³³ Although separation is not explicitly mentioned in this psalm, its real presence is seen in the psalmist's experience, for example, in his descriptions of his affective state. (104) "Through thy precepts I get understanding: therefore I hate every false way." (113) "I hate vain thoughts: but thy law do I love." (128) "Therefore I esteem all thy precepts concerning all things to be right; and I hate every false way." (163) "I hate and abhor lying: but thy law do I love."

¹³⁴ Ezekiel 36:25

¹³⁵ 1 John 3:2-3 "Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is. And every man that hath this hope in him purifieth himself, even as he (*i.e. Jesus*) is pure."

¹³⁶ John 15:3.

¹³⁷ The concept of the sanctifying instrumentality of the revealed word of God is also described by Paul in his letter to the Ephesians (5:25-26) "Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it; that he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word, ..."

keep my judgments, and do them.”¹³⁸ But just as the Temple had to be cleansed so that it was ritually holy, so too must the human heart be cleansed and made practically holy if that heart is ever to become the Bethel of the Holy God. Jesus, again, suggests this reality in His sixth beatitude, “Blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see God.”¹³⁹ Supreme happiness, then, involves not only seeking God with the whole heart (2b, 10a) but hiding the cleansing word of God in the heart (11a).

The View from Inside

¹⁰ With my whole heart have I sought thee:
O let me not wander from thy commandments.



This verse picks up the thoughts of verse 2b and 3b, the blessed “seek him with the whole heart” and “they walk in his ways.” In those verses, however, the view was from the outside, from the point of view of the psalmist observing the blessed from a distance. He saw them (as we would say) wholeheartedly walking in obedience to the spirit of God’s commands. Here we see essentially the same picture, except that we have the additional view of the psalmist’s realization that his wholehearted searching will be in vain if God does not keep him within the constraints of His commandments. The psalmist knows all too well that there is a difference between the believer who is a pilgrim who seeks God, and believers who wander in the wilderness.¹⁴⁰ God’s leading makes all the difference between success and failure. So here we see his fear of losing

¹³⁸ Ezekiel 36:26-27

¹³⁹ Matthew 5:8

¹⁴⁰ Although the writer to the Hebrews equates pilgrims and wanderers as people of faith, he does make a clear distinction between the two groups. “By faith Abraham, when he was called to go out into a place which he should after receive for an inheritance, obeyed; and he went out, not knowing whither he went. By faith he sojourned in the land of promise, as in a strange country, dwelling in tabernacles with Isaac and Jacob, the heirs with him of the same promise: For he looked for a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God. ... These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off, and were persuaded of them, and embraced them, and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth. For they that say such things declare plainly that they seek a country. And truly, if they had been mindful of that country from whence they came out, they might have had opportunity to have returned. But now they desire a better country, that is, an heavenly: wherefore God is not ashamed to be called their God: for he hath prepared for them a city. ... And others ... wandered about in sheepskins and goatskins; being destitute, afflicted, tormented;... they wandered in deserts, and in mountains, and in dens and caves of the earth.” (Hebrews 11:8-10,13-16,36-38)

What the writer to the Hebrews is telling us is that a wanderer has no goal whereas a pilgrim does. A pilgrim “seeks a city whose builder and maker is God.” That city, however, is not an earthly one (i.e. not located geographically on this planet) but a heavenly one. Accordingly, as it pertains to their sojourn on earth, they are not only strangers (being estranged from earthly goals customarily associated with happiness) but wanderers because their goal is not reachable in any physical or geographical sense. The whole concept of physical peregrination (i.e. wandering from one geographic position to another) is thus a parabolic representation of the progression from one spiritual state of awareness and fellowship with God to another. Thus, the Apostle Paul writes, “But we all, with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord.” (2 Corinthians 3:18) That is we go from one state of spiritual glory to an even higher state of greater spiritual glory, a glory that will be revealed. “The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God: And if children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ; if so be that we suffer with him, that we may be also glorified together. For I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us.” (Romans 8:16 – 18)

his way as he seeks for God, which we did not see in his external view of the blessed in verses 2b and 3b. Here we have the view of blessedness from the inside.

There is a real contrast between verses 9 and 10. In verse 9, there is a backward look at defilement of the way in the past. In verse 10, there is a forward look at the way ahead. The underlying image in both verses is that of peregrination, of movement, of spiritual progress toward the supreme happiness of unbroken fellowship with God. But while purification was in view in verse 9a, desire is in view in 10a. And just as the instrumentality of the word for 'way-cleansing' was seen in 9b, so the instrumentality of the commandments for 'way-guiding' is seen in 10b. But commandments can only provide guidance in the way, not the desire to move forward. To consider the image in a modern setting, the commandments are like guides along the way to blessedness but what the pilgrim really needs is spiritual gasoline to move him forward! Ultimately, seeking God requires wholehearted desire.

What is not so obvious is the relation between desire for God and the role that the commandments can play in that progress. The tendency to see commandments as restraints on actions is not helpful here. We must remember that as a communication from God, commandments are part of the revelation of His person and character. Accordingly, it is possible to see commandments as guides to the desire for God. An illustration may help.

Dianne and I arrived in Venice early one morning after taking the night train from Paris. As our hotel was conveniently located across the Grand Canal from the train station, it was as short walk over a nearby bridge. After checking our luggage, we had several hours "at leisure" as tour guides euphemistically refer to time unallocated to prearranged tours. We decided to be *raconteurs* and explore some of our surroundings. One beautiful scene after another opened before our eyes and drew us farther into the city. We found remarkable treasures as we wandered about. Eventually the necessity of returning to our hotel to meet our tour guides occurred to us. Suddenly we had a goal: getting back to our hotel in order to meet our tour guide. It was then that we discovered that we were lost! Fortunately, our hotel was close to a landmark that I was sure anyone familiar with the city would recognize: the train station. So, I decided to ask for directions. Just as fortunately, there were enough city natives who spoke passable English to respond to my pleas for guidance. But there was a complication: Venice is a city of many small alleys, twists and turns. And all the buildings look remarkably similar to the untrained eye. Each set of instructions was a complex assortment of turns left and right and alerts for this architectural feature and that. They were so long, that it was impossible for me to remember them with any accuracy. After each request, we continued following the instructions until memory failed us. When we continued past what we remembered, we wandered from the directions (which we did a few times in the process) and became lost again. Eventually I realized that if I went as far as I could

remember accurately on one set of instructions and then paused to ask further help from a native, I would be given another set of instructions to help us on our way. As we got closer to the train station, the strings of instruction became shorter and more memorable. Eventually we reached the desired goal and our pilgrimage ended. We had started our walk as wanderers and had returned as pilgrims! This experience illustrates the link between verse 10a and 10b. The desire described in 10a marks the psalmist as a pilgrim, but the ongoing dialogue with the commandments provides the constant direction necessary to his success as a pilgrim and to prevent his relapse into spiritual wandering. The commandments tell us about the way. Jesus makes the bold assertion, "I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me"¹⁴¹ The role of the commandments, then, are not only to support dialogue about the way, but they tell us who Jesus is.

Hidden Treasure

¹¹ Thy word ¹⁴² have I hid in mine heart,
That I might not sin against thee.



This verse is perhaps one of the most familiar verses of this psalm. It is usually cited as a testimony for the fact that the person has memorized some part of the scriptures that is particularly important to them. While that is not an incorrect understanding, it misses a great deal that this verse conveys. The first octave introduced us to the general vocabulary of this psalm: law, testimonies, precepts, statutes, commandments, and judgments. This octave has introduces us to two additional and closely related terms both translated as word: דָּבָר *dabar* (pronounced daw-baw') and אִמְרָה *'imrah* (pronounced im-row'). *Dabar* refers more collectively to all that God has said. As such it provides a convenient way of looking at the entire vocabulary mentioned and all the examples of each. Its use in verse 9 suggests that in order to keep one's way pure, one must pay attention to everything that God has said. *'Imrah*, on the other hand, refers to a particular expression or communication, a particular commandment, testimony, precept, statute or judgment. דָּבָר *dabar* occurs 1290 times in the Old Testament, 23 times in this psalm; while אִמְרָה *'imrah* occurs only 35 times, 19 times in this psalm. It is the remarkable that half the entire usage of such a relatively rare Old Testament word occurs in this psalm but its nature of specificity suggests that in order to keep one's way steadily directed to the ultimate happiness of harmonious fellowship with God, one must treasure up (or hide) each and every utterance of God in one's heart. This usage anticipates the old monastic greeting of young monks to their elders: "Abba give us a word." Their plea was for some true saying that the Geron or old man had won through

¹⁴¹ John 14:6

¹⁴² אִמְרָה (pronounced im-row')

years of difficult spiritual struggle (aesthesis) that they could treasure up in their hearts and direct their lives by. They considered the source of the *'imrah* and so should we. In their case it was the word of an experienced elder. In the psalmist's case (and ours) it is THY word.

Whether individually or collectively the word of the LORD manifests attributes of its Author. It is pure, true, everlasting¹⁴³, and, above all, possessed of an essential unity. As God is one, so His word is inevitably coherent as well as holy, pure, wise, just, and precious. And this coherence means that although the specific words may be different and serve different purposes, there is a kind of hidden dialogue among them that manifests their essential unity. If we, for example, would deeply understand the various sayings of the Decalogue, we can gain insight by understanding how the commandments of God integrate the testimony of God about human circumstances and, by means of His precepts, result in His specific statutes under which He renders His quintessentially just judgments. When God invites us to "reason together,"¹⁴⁴ it is this hidden dialogue He desires us to comprehend. And, since His word is essentially coherent, each and every word (*'Imrah*) of His is potentially connected to every other. Each word has this property that it can unlock mysteries about many, if not all, of His other words (*Dabar*). It is this powerful property that makes each word precious to the psalmist and its discovery a great joy. "I rejoice at thy word, as one that findeth great spoil."¹⁴⁵ What then does it actually mean to hide such a word in one's heart? For the psalmist, the heart is the center our cognitive, affective, and volitional nature. It controls human behavior. "Keep thy heart with all diligence; for out of it are the issues of life."¹⁴⁶ But to have a heart capable of hiding and interrogating each word of God in the secrecy of one's own being is a gift of God. "But the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned."¹⁴⁷ Therefore the very capability to "hide thy word in my heart" argues the presence of a heart that has been touched by God's grace. "A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you: and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you a heart of flesh."¹⁴⁸

This verse acquaints us with the details of exactly how the psalmist takes heed unto his way according to all that God has said. He does it by internalizing one precious word at a time and maintaining a dialogue with those valuable discoveries day and night.¹⁴⁹

¹⁴³ Psalm 119:140 "Thy word is very pure: therefore thy servant loveth it" Psalm 119:160 "Thy word is true from the beginning: and every one of thy righteous judgments endureth for ever." Psalm 119:142 "Thy righteousness is an everlasting righteousness, and thy law is the truth." Psalm 119:144 "The righteousness of thy testimonies is everlasting: give me understanding, and I shall live."

¹⁴⁴ Isaiah 1:18 Come now, and let us reason together, saith the LORD: though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool.

¹⁴⁵ Psalm 119:162

¹⁴⁶ Proverbs 4:23

¹⁴⁷ 1 Corinthians 2:14

¹⁴⁸ Ezekiel 36:26

¹⁴⁹ Psalm 1:2 But his delight is in the law of the LORD; and in his law doth he meditate day and night.

Each word becomes a hint, a clue, and a treasure map, leading to yet more words that he can absorb and allow to influence his behavior in every situation. Each discovery further “quickens” him. They order his steps in their light and prevent iniquity from having dominion over his will.¹⁵⁰ In consequence of this hidden dialogue with God, the psalmist knows that he will not “walk not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor stand in the way of sinners, nor sit in the seat of the scornful.”¹⁵¹ Entering into the hidden dialogue of God’s various words (*Imrah*) has brought harmony in his relationship with God, and this is true blessedness. It significant that, for the Christian, אַמְרָה *'imrah* points to דָּבָר *dabar* and דָּבָר *dabar* points to the Λογος *logos*: Jesus - the Divine Expression - the Christ.

The Secret of Successful Meditation

¹⁰ With my whole heart have I sought thee:
O let me not wander from thy commandments.

...

¹² Blessed art thou, O LORD:
Teach me thy statutes.



The psalmist begins the twelfth verse with the assertion “Blessed art thou, O LORD.” The term he uses for blessedness is not *esher* (supremely happy) of verse 1-3 but *barak* (supremely worthy). It is an attestation of the ultimate worthiness of God, of worth-ship. The reasoning for his request to be taught the statutes of God in 12b is simple. God alone is worthy to do this. He not only gave the commandments but the statutes are His as well. The prayer of this octave is contained in verses 10b and 12b: “O let me not wander from thy commandments ... teach me thy statutes.” As explained, because the word (*dabar*) of God is coherent, the statutes flow from the commandments. To wander from the commandments, then can mean (among other things) a failure to comprehend how the statutes are derived from the commandments. If we view a commandment as a starting point in our pilgrimage of meditation and a particular statute that flows from it as our destination, then to wander from the commandment is to fail to keep the full and correct understanding of the statute as our goal. It is to miss what these are saying about God, Himself. We wander along the way of pilgrimage and get lost. So, when the psalmist requests that God a) not let him wander from His commandments and b) teach him His statutes; he is really asking God to accompany him on every pilgrimage of meditation on the law.¹⁵²

¹⁵⁰ Psalm 119:133 Order my steps in thy word: and let not any iniquity have dominion over me.

¹⁵¹ Psalm 1:1

¹⁵² Psalm 1:1,2 (extracted & glossed) Blessed (אִשֶּׁר 'esher) is the man ... (*whose*) ... delight is in the law of the LORD; and in his law doth he meditate day and night.

As we noted in the last lesson, because the word of the LORD is a revelation of God, the word also makes manifest His attributes, and among these His one-ness.¹⁵³ The notion of personifying the word of the LORD in order to understand its underlying coherence in the more familiar terms of a harmonious dialogue is useful for our understanding, but not to support meditation. Meditation does not so much involve our entering into the hypothetical dialogue between the commandment and the statute but with God, himself, about the rationale of their interconnectedness and what that interconnectedness says about God Himself. In short, in giving us the commandment and the statute, God actually is inviting us to explore with Him how they relate to one another. He is inviting exactly this kind of prayer, not only from the psalmist but from each of us. Again, as noted, the invitation “Come now, and let us reason together, saith the LORD”¹⁵⁴ is to each of us and is nascent in every word (אמרה 'imrah,) of the LORD.

But even having invited us to pray as the psalmist does, we might ask what God desires of us for Him to support such effective meditation? The answer is easily found in this part of the psalm. The psalmist’s prayer is clearly the expression of his heart.¹⁵⁵ In effect he is saying, ‘With my whole heart I have sought thee, because Thou art worthy. Let me not wander from thy commandments, but teach me thy statutes.’

When we consider the wonder and the honor to paid to us by the Creator and Ruler of the Universe by inviting us to enter into the relationship between His words, is it any wonder that He should require of us other than our whole-hearted participation in that process? A lip-service repetition of this prayer will never do.¹⁵⁶ God looks upon the heart and what He seeks are those who truly declare His worthiness in their spirit.¹⁵⁷ It is a great wonder to me is that many a Christian allows this golden opportunity to dialogue with God to go unobserved and unpursued.

What is it then that the psalmist will do with such knowledge when God grants his request? We need only read further down to find out.

¹⁵³ The context in which the שמע shama` of Deuteronomy 6:4 occurs is interesting and a good point to consider relative to what we have been saying about the inherent coherence of the Word of the LORD: Deuteronomy 6:1-7 “Now these are the commandments, the statutes, and the judgments, which the LORD your God commanded to teach you, that ye might do them in the land whither ye go to possess it: That thou mightest fear the LORD thy God, to keep all his statutes and his commandments, which I command thee, thou, and thy son, and thy son’s son, all the days of thy life; and that thy days may be prolonged. Hear (שמע shama`) therefore, O Israel, and observe to do it; that it may be well with thee, and that ye may increase mightily, as the LORD God of thy fathers hath promised thee, in the land that floweth with milk and honey. Hear, O Israel (שמע ישראל shama` Yisra’el): The LORD our God is one LORD: And thou shalt love the LORD thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy might. And these words, which I command thee this day, shall be in thine heart. And thou shalt teach them diligently unto thy children, and shalt talk of them when thou sittest in thine house, and when thou walkest by the way, and when thou liest down, and when thou risest up.” (i.e. day and night)

¹⁵⁴ Isaiah 1:18 “Come now, and let us reason together, saith the LORD: though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool.”

¹⁵⁵ Luke 6:45 “A good man out of the good treasure of his heart bringeth forth that which is good; and an evil man out of the evil treasure of his heart bringeth forth that which is evil: for of the abundance of the heart his mouth speaketh”

¹⁵⁶ Matthew 15:8 “This people draweth nigh unto me with their mouth, and honoreth me with their lips; but their heart is far from me.”

¹⁵⁷ John 4:23 “But the hour cometh, and now is, when the true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth: for the Father seeketh such to worship him.”

¹⁵ I will meditate in thy precepts,
And have respect unto thy ways
¹⁶ I will delight myself in thy statutes
I will not forget thy word (*dabar*)

But that is another lesson.

Outspoken Joy

¹³ With my lips *have I* declared
All the judgments of thy mouth
¹⁴ *I have* rejoiced in the way of thy testimonies,
As much as in all riches



These verses look back to the psalmist's recent experience. They also form a bridge between the psalmist's plea "teach me thy statutes" (12b) and his promise "I will meditate in thy precepts" (15a). Why should God say anything to the psalmist? Clearly, he testifies that he has been doing something that warrants God's favorable reply to his plea to be taught. What has he done? He has faithfully passed on judgment that he knows of. "With my lips have I declared all the judgments of thy mouth." What God has told him (i.e. "the judgments of thy mouth"), he has personally declared with his lips. The student has become a teacher of others. The blessing that God has intended for the psalmist has been shared with whoever would listen to him. Nor has his role as communicator been a begrudging one. Not only has he declared "all thy judgments" but he has "rejoiced in the way of thy testimonies." The joy mentioned here is like the joy of finding great wealth. "I have rejoiced ... as much as in all riches." The phrase "all riches" links with "all thy judgments." It conveys the psalmist's realization that there is a great wealth of wisdom and guidance for life in God's judgments and testimonies.¹⁵⁸ The joy, of course is the joy borne of love's desire fulfilled. Verse 14 says much, therefore, about the character of the psalmist as a worthy teacher. A great teacher has two loves: his students and his subject.

The position of these verses between "teach me thy statutes" and "I will meditate in thy precepts," tells us that a great teacher is also a great learner. Great teachers never stop learning. It is the love of his subject that keeps the great teacher ever learning.¹⁵⁹ It is the love for his students that keeps the great teacher ever teaching. That which God has told them, they tell to others as an expression of their love. The psalmist knows

¹⁵⁸ Again, it is the judgments based on the testimonies that look back to the statutes that formed the basis for those judgments. If the psalmist would be taught "thy statutes", then the manner in which he relates to God's testimonies and judgments says a great deal about his worthiness and readiness to receive such instruction.

¹⁵⁹ Love of learning is the central difference between a student and a scholar.

(perhaps intuitively) the great spiritual truth: "Give, and it shall be given unto you ... with the same measure that ye mete withal it shall be measured to you again"¹⁶⁰

As love finds joy in union, great teachers find joy in uniting their knowledge with their students' minds. But what he has told to others has not come easily to him. It required meditation on God's judgments and testimonies. So too if he asks to be taught thy statutes, then he will need to back out of the judgments and testimonies those precepts that were involved in integrating statute and testimony to arrive at a judgment. He will need to meditate on how God thinks about the world of men from His holy omniscience, wisdom, and love as revealed in His commandments and statutes. He will need to "meditate in thy precepts."

Having said somewhat about great teachers, we must acknowledge that one of the criticisms of professors of higher learning is that they live in a theoretical, "ivory tower" world far removed from the difficult realities of everyday-life. Institutes for higher learning are sometimes seen as "hot houses" that maintain unreal environments for the forced intellectual growth of their students. While this may be so in the world of human "higher education" - it is not the case here. The object of the psalmist's rejoicing is not some abstract testimony about how life is. He rejoices "in the way of thy testimonies." This phrase implies that God's testimonies are not just statements about life in general but that they tell us exactly how to live effectively and happily in a very troubled and evil world. The psalmist who rejoices in the way of thy testimonies as one who finds great treasure is the same person whom princes will speak against¹⁶¹ and the proud will persecute.¹⁶² His is not an "ivory tower" world. And that raises an interesting question. Is it possible for the individual to live joyfully (or blessedly) in a very hateful and violent world? Can one rejoice when one is spoken against or defrauded or persecuted? It would appear that the answer these verses provide is a resounding "yes." Lying, almost subliminally,¹⁶³ under these verses is another Teacher's assessment of the way of thy testimonies. "Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness' sake: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake. Rejoice, and be exceeding glad: for great is your reward in heaven: for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you."¹⁶⁴

¹⁶⁰ Learning so that we may teach others is clearly a specific instance of the general spiritual principle announced by our Lord Jesus, "Give, and it shall be given unto you; good measure, pressed down, and shaken together, and running over, shall men give into your bosom. For with the same measure that ye mete withal it shall be measured to you again." (Luke 6:38)

¹⁶¹ Psalm 119:23 "Princes also did sit and speak against me: but thy servant did meditate in thy statutes."

¹⁶² Psalm 119:84 - 86 "How many are the days of thy servant? When wilt thou execute judgment on them that persecute me? The proud have digged pits for me, which are not after thy law. All thy commandments are faithful: they persecute me wrongfully; help thou me."

¹⁶³ Subliminal - a mental process lying below the threshold of sensation or consciousness perceived by or affecting someone's mind without their being aware of it.

¹⁶⁴ Matthew 5:10-12

Interior Happiness

15 I will meditate in thy precepts,
And have respect unto thy ways
16 I will delight myself in thy statutes
I will not forget thy word



In the last lesson we considered the psalmist as a teacher. What he had heard, he passed on to others. “With my lips *have* I declared all the judgments of thy mouth.” (13) This statement by the psalmist supports the worthiness of his plea that the LORD would “Teach me thy statutes.” What he had been blessed with before, he had shared with others and therefore he could hope that God would be pleased to give him more to share. It was a case of his pleading the divine principle: “Give and it shall be given unto you.”¹⁶⁵ But verses 13 and 14 are also a bridge to the four additional promises contained in these verses: “I will meditate ... (I will) have respect ... I will delight myself ... I will not forget ... ” If we recall that the focus of this psalm is about the happiness of living in a harmonious relationship with the LORD, then we have a rare glimpse into not only the interior life of a great teacher, but a truly happy person.¹⁶⁶ The four words the psalmist uses are interesting for their interconnectedness.

I will meditate - שיח שיח *siyach*, a primitive root meaning to ponder, or, by implication, to converse with oneself. The word carries the sense of an interior dialogue about something outside of one self.

I will have respect - נבט נבט *nabat*, a primitive root meaning to scan or to look intently at, by implication to regard with pleasure, favor or care; to have respect for.

I will delight myself - שׂעׂע sha`a` a primitive root meaning (in a good way) to look upon with complacency that is fondle, please, or amuse oneself with.¹⁶⁷

I will not forget - שכח שכח *shakach*, a primitive root meaning not to mislay from want of memory or attention, not to forget.

We may catch a glimpse of the interconnectedness if we think of a child at the seashore who has been looking at the stones, shells, and sea-glass. Suddenly he finds an object of interest, let us say a stone. Picking it up, he turns it over and over in his hand, observing with delight (שׂעׂע sha`a`) its color and structure. Its wet surface sparkles in the sun. He studies the stone closely (נבט נבט *nabat*) and begins to wonder what hidden processes have made it so. He thinks about the object in his hand, as if by taking thought he might unlock the secret of its genesis (שיח שיח *siyach*). Finally, he puts it in his pocket, resolving to

¹⁶⁵ Luke 6:38a

¹⁶⁶ ... Or, at least, a person well on his way to that happy estate.

¹⁶⁷ It also has a bad sense to look about with dismay and confusion. But that is not the case here.

take this wonderful object home to add to his collection of childhood treasures (שכח shakach) kept in an old wooden box under his bed.

Taken together, these promises tell us not only that a great teacher is also a lifetime learner at the mouth of the LORD, but also a person whose interior life is full of unseen treasure gathered up a little at a time over many years.¹⁶⁸ Here we also see part of the answer to the question of whether a person can be truly happy in an evil and often violent world. This psalm teaches us that the happiness, of which it speaks, depends on the choices we make. It requires making a decision favor the development of the interior live over a life whose happiness is based on exterior circumstances. Time and again, the psalmist turns from the turbulent and threatening world full of evil and proud people outside himself to an interior world in pursuit of fellowship with God.

"Princes also did sit and speak against me: but thy servant did meditate in thy statutes. (23)...The bands of the wicked have robbed me: but I have not forgotten thy law. (61)...The proud have forged a lie against me: but I will keep thy precepts with my whole heart. Their heart is as fat as grease; but I delight in thy law. (69-70)...The proud...dealt perversely with me without a cause: but I will meditate in thy precepts. (78)...The proud have digged pits for me...they persecute me wrongfully...they had almost consumed me upon earth; but I forsook not thy precepts. (85-87)...The wicked have waited for me to destroy me: but I will consider thy testimonies. (95)...Princes have persecuted me without a cause: but my heart standeth in awe of thy word. (161)"

In reality, the choice is a familiar one. Such interior pursuit of God requires faith, so that the psalmist chooses consistently to walk by faith not sight.¹⁶⁹ Just as it is impossible to please God without faith;¹⁷⁰ so too, true happiness is also impossible without faith. But all things are possible to him that believes.¹⁷¹ So that it is possible to live happily in an evil and violent world but not without the faithful prayer in which this psalm abounds.

¹⁶⁸ Isaiah 28:9-10 "Whom shall he teach knowledge? And whom shall he make to understand doctrine? Them that are weaned from the milk and drawn from the breasts; for precept must be upon precept, precept upon precept; line upon line, line upon line; here a little, and there a little..."

¹⁶⁹ 2 Corinthians 5:7 (For we walk by faith, not by sight:)

¹⁷⁰ Hebrews 11:6 "But without faith it is impossible to please him: for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him." And Mark 9:23 "Jesus said unto him, If thou canst believe, all things are possible to him that believeth."

¹⁷¹ And Mark 9:23 "Jesus said unto him, If thou canst believe, all things are possible to him that believeth."

ג (GIMEL)

☞ The Servant-Stranger's Desire for God's Word ☞

- 17 Deal bountifully with thy servant,
That I may live, and keep thy word
18 Open thou mine eyes,
That I may behold wondrous things out of thy law
19 I am a stranger in the earth:
Hide not thy commandments from me.
20 My soul breaketh for the longing that it hath
Unto thy judgments at all times

☞ The Servant-Stranger's Prayer for Deliverance ☞

- 21 Thou hast rebuked the proud that are cursed,
Which do err from thy commandments.
22 Remove from me reproach and contempt;
For I have kept thy testimonies.
23 Princes also did sit and speak against me:
But thy servant did meditate in thy statutes
24 Thy testimonies also are my delight
And my counselors



ג - Gimel means a camel. The camel is a pack animal capable of bearing heavy burdens and the hardships of the desert. It suggests the psalmist's desire for companionship with One who will bear the hardships and the burdens of his spiritual pilgrimage in the wilderness.

"In this section the trials of the way appear to be manifest to the Psalmist's mind, and he prays accordingly for the help which will meet his case. As in the last eight verses he prayed as a youth newly come into the world, so here he pleads as a servant and a pilgrim, who growingly finds himself to be a stranger in an enemy's country. His appeal is to God alone, and his prayer is especially direct and personal. He speaks with the Lord as a man speaketh with his friend."¹⁷²

Peter reminds us to "Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God, that he may exalt you in due time. Casting all your care upon him; for he careth for you."¹⁷³ There is no one in this wide world that cares for the troubles we experience and the burdens we bear like our Lord Jesus. He bore the burden of our sin and guilt to the cross of Calvary and He bears the burden of our cares, perplexities, and sorrows every day in ceaseless intercession before the face of His Father in heaven. What a humble and

¹⁷² CH Spurgeon The Treasury of David

¹⁷³ 1 Peter 5:6-7

loving companion He is, willing to bear our many burdens, along the pathway of our pilgrimage!

Verse 17: "Deal bountifully with thy servant, that I may live, and keep thy word"

What is it that sustains us amid spiritual trials but communion with God? In His wilderness temptation, our Lord, when tempted to feed Himself by turning rocks that looked like loaves into actual bread, answered the tempter, "It is written, Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God."¹⁷⁴

Verse 18: "Open thou mine eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of thy law. "

The wilderness is a place of learning what God has to teach. It was so for Moses, John the Baptist and the apostle Paul. It is also a place of solitude where our total dependence on God is manifest. It was in the wilderness that God dealt with Jacob. So, it is a place of earnest prayer. And the prayer here is for illumination: "Open my eyes that I may behold wonderful things out of thy Torah" (i.e. thy teachings). The application to our lives in the spiritual wilderness of this world is obvious.

Verse 19: "I am a stranger in the earth: hide not thy commandments (*mitzvot*) from me. "

If we are pilgrims on our way to the heavenly city not made with hands eternal in the heavens, then in this present world we are strangers among world-lings who live their life for the present moment and do not seek the Kingdom of God at all, let alone first. The apostle warns us "as strangers and pilgrims, abstain from fleshly lusts, which war against the soul."¹⁷⁵ But the pilgrim should not only abstain from the lusts of the flesh but seek out those good things (*mitzvot*) that God has for him to enjoy and for him to do unto others as he passes by.

Verse 20: "My soul breaketh for the longing that it hath unto thy judgments at all times"

In this verse the psalmist tells us of his constant and 'crushing' need for God's judgments. In the pilgrim pathway there are endless pitfalls, traps, and spiritual dangers that require constant vigilance and discernment. Who can tell what the end will be of that which seems good? The pilgrim who walks by faith and not by sight must confess every moment his desperate need for God's verdicts on this or that potential step or misstep. In the sense of the word "judgments" is that the answer is a decree that addresses itself to the circumstances, the place where the pilgrim is, what is at issue and the consequences of a misstep. God is not seen here as a judge who punishes the wrong doer. Rather He is a judge who instructs the willing individual in the right way to go. "Thine ears shall hear a word behind thee, saying, this is the way, walk ye in it, when ye turn to the right hand, and when ye turn to the left."¹⁷⁶

¹⁷⁴ Matthew 4:4 quoting Deuteronomy 8:3 And he humbled thee, and suffered thee to hunger, and fed thee with manna, which thou knewest not, neither did thy fathers know; that he might make thee know that man doth not live by bread only, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of the LORD doth man live.

¹⁷⁵ 1 Peter 2:11

¹⁷⁶ Isaiah 30:21

Verse 21: "Thou hast rebuked the proud that are cursed, which do err from thy commandments. "

Proverbs warn us that, "pride goeth before destruction and a haughty spirit before a fall."¹⁷⁷ In verse 21 the pilgrim pathway is littered with the bleached bones of the proud who were rebuked of God and were finally cursed because they persisted in their ignorance and therefore erred from the way of "thy commandments" (i.e. the way of God's spiritual principles on how to live.) Therefore, the pilgrim must watch for pride in all its myriad forms lest he too be rebuked of God and fall into their trap. It was Isaac the Syrian who observed that the devil can set no traps in the pathway of humility.

Verse 22: "Remove from me reproach and contempt; for I have kept thy testimonies. "

The trials and temptations of our earthly pilgrimage are both internal and external. In verse 21, the danger was from indwelling pride. In Verse 22 the danger is from hostility outside of us. The threatening and contradictions of sinners against the pilgrim¹⁷⁸ can have no effect as long as the pilgrim's heart does not give way to the fear of men. He must choose between the fear of men and the fear of God. The former will move the individual off the path, because the fear of men brings a trap.¹⁷⁹ It is not that the psalmist here wants men to speak well of him because he has borne witness to the truth of God's word, but that the criticisms of hostile people will not deter him from proceeding along the pathway. The Apostle Paul reminds Timothy, that "all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution."¹⁸⁰ Rather we should "rejoice and be exceeding glad when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake ... for great is our reward in heaven: for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you."¹⁸¹ We are in good company.

Verse 23: "Princes also did sit and speak against me: but thy servant did meditate in thy statutes. "

This verse continues the previous one. It is one thing when base and ignoble men speak ill of the pilgrim, but the rich and powerful (the princes of this present world) pose an even greater threat. Jesus, himself could say "the prince of this world cometh, and hath nothing in me."¹⁸² The pilgrim knows the most basic of spiritual defense mechanisms: 'Keep your eyes on the LORD!' The princes spoke against him but he meditated on "thy statutes." He reflected on those things most assuredly settled, the statutory things of God: His unfailing love, His unerring wisdom, His impeccable holiness, His infinite power, and His unchanging truth.

¹⁷⁷ Proverbs 16:18

¹⁷⁸ Hebrews 12:3 For consider him that endured such contradiction of sinners against himself, lest ye be wearied and faint in your minds.

¹⁷⁹ Proverbs 29:25 The fear of man bringeth a snare: but whoso putteth his trust in the LORD shall be safe.

¹⁸⁰ 2 Timothy 3:12

¹⁸¹ Matthew 5:11-12

¹⁸² John 14:30b

Verse 24: “Thy testimonies also are my delight and my counselors. “

Viewed from the outside, the pilgrim pathway is one of loneliness, bleakness, barrenness, pain and suffering. But the psalmist ends this section by assuring us that there is a difference between appearance and reality. The witness of God to his soul is a constant delight of which the inhabitants of the lands through which he passes know nothing. Nor is the pilgrim alone, though all forsake him. The Apostle Paul knew this first hand. When the princes spoke against him, “all men forsook me ... notwithstanding the Lord stood with me, and strengthened me; that by me the preaching might be fully known, and that all the Gentiles might hear: and I was delivered out of the mouth of the lion.”¹⁸³

On the Way

¹⁷ Deal bountifully with thy servant,
That I may live, and keep thy word.



This verse is not a *quid pro quo* transaction. Had the psalmist written, deal bountifully with thy servant, and I will live and keep thy word; the case for such a mistaken notion might seem more reasonable. But life or death is not a choice that the psalmist would make in order to exert pressure on God for an outcome that he would desire. This prayer, instead, contains a simple statement of the fundamental ground rule of the psalmist’s spiritual pilgrimage. His life and obedience depend on the grace of God, not his own efforts. There is absolutely nothing he can do to sustain the continuance of spiritual life and obedience apart from God’s bountiful dealing with him in grace.

We can gain a deeper understanding of just how deep this assertion goes if we consider the wider picture this octave presents us. Gimel means camel. If we consider the vulnerabilities of one traversing a strange and inhospitable wilderness, we realize how important his camel was as a burden bearer of the stored necessities of life (food, water, shelter, clothes, weapons of protection, simple furniture, etc.) to sustain his life. The camel carried an outsized backpack for a long range hiker through a land of death. But the camel, though necessary to keep death through starvation or thirst at bay, was not sufficient to that end. The pilgrim still needed a source of food, water, and other life supporting necessities to load his camel with. He needed an oasis, a caravanserai, a village in the wilderness where he could bargain for supplies from native people who eked out sustenance for themselves. Such cities were inevitably walled for defense and, although their gates were open for people to enter and leave, the constant danger of spies from an approaching hostile army sent ahead to spy out their defenses was a real threat. So, elders (princes) sat in the open space just inside the main gate to interrogate

¹⁸³ 2 Timothy 4:16 - 17

strangers who entered. Against this background, verse 23a sheds light on the pilgrim's desperate state. "Princes also did sit and speak against me." The psalmist, on his pilgrimage could expect no supplies from a city that closed its heart (and gate) against him. They would provide him nothing for his camel to bear on his pilgrimage. To the rulers of the little town (suffering perhaps from xenophobia) he was not a just a stranger but an enemy. So, he is cast upon the God who has called him forth as He had Abraham before him. Unless God deals bountifully with His servant he will surely die in the wilderness, camel or no. Of course, this verse in the day and locale when and where it was written, might well have seemed a prayer appropriate to a purely physical situation. The prayer our Lord Jesus provides, "give us this day our daily bread", can mean exactly the same thing; a prayer for a physical loaf of bread from a baker to support our physical life at the present moment. But in our day of 24/7 supermarkets whose shelves abound not only in bread but in every other conceivable food and drink, the physicality of Jesus' sample prayer seems remote to our actual situation. Why pray in desperation for something that is well within our reach just around the corner. The answer is that we are not just praying for the life of our physical body but our spiritual life. In that sense, the psalmist is not any different than us. His pilgrimage, like our pilgrimage, is not a geographic journey, but a spiritual one. The life that he pleads to be sustained is His spiritual life in God, not his physical life on earth. And life in God is fellowship with God – relationship. The justification of a prayer for a harmonious relationship with God is "that I may live, and keep thy word." Harmonious life in God is obedience in relationship. The hostility touched on in 23a is a testimony that fellowship with the present world system will sustain neither the psalmist's spiritual life nor ours. We cannot serve God and mammon.¹⁸⁴

Finally, the plea for God to "deal bountifully" reveals the depth and breadth of our spiritual needs. Bounty here is not a veiled plea for a life of wasteful excess because of God's super-abundance of supply. The psalmist's spiritual needs are great and so are ours. They are exceedingly varied and so are ours. He, as we, need daily enlightenment, encouragement, correction, reproof, instruction in righteousness, protection, cleansing, warning, counsel, testimony, doctrine, and many other things to sustain our life in God.¹⁸⁵ Certainly God, in His total fidelity, will answer this prayer favorably. But it is

¹⁸⁴ The sense of our dependency on God rather than the world of men (or money) lies behind Jesus' teaching on God vs. mammon. Notice how He invites us to observe the world of birds in order to learn the lesson. "No man can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon. Therefore I say unto you, Take no thought for your life, what ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink; nor yet for your body, what ye shall put on. Is not the life more than meat, and the body than raiment? Behold the fowls of the air: for they sow not, neither do they reap, nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feedeth them. Are ye not much better than they?" (Matthew 6:24-26)

Had the rich farmer realized this, he would not have pulled down his barns and built bigger in which to "bestow all my fruits and my goods." Had he seen beyond his existing barns and considered "the ravens which neither sow nor reap; which neither have storehouse nor barn" and how "God feedeth them"; he would have shared his abundance instead of dying as a fool who had selfishly denied sustenance to the pilgrims who were all around him. (see Luke 12:16-21)

¹⁸⁵ 2 Timothy 3:16 – 17 All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works.

not apparent that He will bestow all upon the supplicant 'willy-nilly'. He gives in a timely fashion. His timing, as much as His largess, is central to the preservation of our spiritual lives. His provision is always in due time, as was the case of His provision of our Savior, the Lord Jesus. "For when we were yet without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly."¹⁸⁶

Wonder

¹⁸ Open thou mine eyes,
That I may behold wondrous things out of thy law.¹⁸⁷



This is a prayer for enlightenment. It has a counterpart in the New Testament in Paul's desire for the church at Ephesus, who "making mention of you in my prayers....that ...the eyes of your understanding being enlightened; that ye may know what is the hope of his calling, and what the riches of the glory of his inheritance in the saints, and what is the exceeding greatness of his power to us-ward who believe, according to the working of his mighty power, which he wrought in Christ, when he raised him from the dead, and set him at his own right hand in the heavenly places, ..."188 The psalmist pleads to have his eyes stripped¹⁸⁹ of any 'visual' impediment so that he might "behold wondrous things out of thy law." There is a real difference between looking, seeing, and beholding, although all involve the eye. We may better understand this if we consider two people who go to an art museum to look at the paintings. One person has very little understanding of art in general. He goes to the first painting and looks at it and then moves on to the next and the next, looking at each in succession. At the end of the day, if we asked him what he saw, he might say "a bunch of nice paintings." The other person has a measure of understanding of the art of painting. He comes to the first painting and looks at it. Suddenly he sees something about the painting, perhaps its composition or some interesting detail. His initial response is puzzlement. "How did the artist do that?" he wonders to himself. Unable to find a ready answer in his limited understanding, he continues to gaze at the painting, beholding the feature of interest as a kind of mystery unfolding before his eyes. I remember an experience that my brother David and I had like this. We were looking at a painting by a Dutch Master, a still-life with a fragile crystal goblet in the setting. As

¹⁸⁶ Romans 5:6 (See also 1 Corinthians 15:8 "And last of all he was seen of me also, as of one born out of due time."; 1 Timothy 2:6 "Who gave himself a ransom for all, to be testified in due time."; 1 Peter 5:6 "Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God, that he may exalt you in due time")

¹⁸⁷ תורה towrah, or torah meaning law or teaching.

¹⁸⁸ Ephesians 1:15- 20 (selected) the first chapter of Ephesians is easily one of Paul's longest run-on sentences and a real challenge to parse and understand. I commend it as an exercise.

¹⁸⁹ The word translated "open" is גלה galah, (pronounced gaw-law') a primitive root; meaning to denude (especially in a disgraceful sense); by implication, to exile (captives being usually stripped). His desire then is to have his eyes stripped of any impediment that would occlude his spiritual vision. He is not talking just about his eyelids. Prejudices, pre-conceived notions, past lies that we have believed all impair spiritual vision and present us from seeing what it is that God is saying to us.

we moved closer to the painting we saw a series of somewhat irregular white lines against a dark ground. As we moved back, suddenly (at about twenty feet) the lines converged and a delicate crystal goblet appeared as if by magic. Back and forth, in and out, we paced. Each time the same optical wonder occurred. I remember my brother, an accomplished artist, whispering to himself "How did he do that?" It was quite wonderful to behold. Most people look, but do not see. But when someone sees a thing they have difficulty understanding, their response (if they are truly desirous of understanding) is wonder. Wonder is an emotional response to what they see but do not yet fully comprehend. And it is this affective response of wonder at a thing of perception that arrests their gaze so that they hold the object in their view as part of their struggle to understand. They 'behold' the object. When the archeologist Howard Carter was opening the burial chamber of King Tutankhamen in the Valley of the Kings in Egypt, Lord Carnarvon, the expedition's sponsor, asked him, "What do you see?" "Wonderful things" was Carter's terse reply. Things can elicit wonder in the eye of the beholder. The psalmist is pleading for this experience of seeing in the Torah things that will arrest his attention with wonder. He does not just want to look, or to see, but to behold with wonder. He knows that those "wondrous things" are there. That is also why he goes on to ask in the next verse that God not "hide" His commandments from the him.

But why is this request for enlightenment germane to the octave of the camel? The camel is the companion of the stranger (19a) and the pilgrim (54b). But the psalmist's peregrinations are neither geographic nor his destination a place. Rather his desired end is fellowship with God and, to that end; he must get to know Him. There is much, of course, about God that is entirely unknowable by any created being. But there is much that can be known; much that He has shown in His Teaching (His Torah). "That ye may know..." was the intent Paul's prayer for the enlightenment of the Ephesians mentioned above. The things in Paul's mind, "the hope of his calling ... the riches of the glory of his inheritance in the saints, and ... the exceeding greatness of his power to us-ward who believe" might well have been among the things of God ¹⁹⁰ that the psalmist wished to behold in wonder.

We might surmise, then, that knowledge is the chief end of this prayer. But there is much value in wonder itself. The Person of God should draw forth wonder, as well as love and fear. Indeed, one of the chief tones of a harmonious relationship with Him is wonder. Why wonder? Wonder carries with it an inherent personal testimony of worthiness. When we find things that elicit our wonder ("wonderful things") that arrest our attention, we are saying in effect that the thing at which I am wondering is worthy

¹⁹⁰ The term the things of God is a phrase that has great import for the book of Romans where the phrase "of God" recurs 70 times: "the gospel of God, ... beloved of God, ... the will of God, ... the power of God unto salvation, ... the righteousness of God, ... the wrath of God, ... the truth of God, ... the judgment of God, ... the goodness of God" are a few among of the many wonderful things which "may be known of God."

of such attention. Wonder is one of the chief foundations of worship, and worship is the foundational tone of any harmonious relationship with God. "... the hour cometh, and now is, when the true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth: for the Father seeketh such to worship him."¹⁹¹ God is the Great God of Wonders and those who worship Him must do so in wonder. And perhaps the greatest wonder of all is His love for sinful humanity, for us, that bid Him to send His Son, Jesus to be our sin and guilt bearing "camel" that we might live by His sacrifice.

The Desperate Search

- ¹⁸ Open thou mine eyes,
That I may behold wondrous things out of thy law.
¹⁹ I am a stranger in the earth:
Hide not thy commandments from me.



In many ways the prayer of verse 19 is the counterpart of the prayer in verse 18. In the later the psalmist asks God to "hide not" while in verse 18 he asks that God open his eyes. "Thy commandments" are certainly a foundational part of "thy law." The psalmist clearly wants everything God has said to be hidden with him but not from him. "Thy word have I hid in mine heart, that I might not sin against thee." (11) What is not immediately clear is why the psalmist bases his plea "hide not thy commandments from me" on his assertion that he is a stranger in the earth.

What any traveler in a foreign land senses almost immediately, is the constant need to find his way. Most resort to maps. One can tell the foreigner in almost any city by their puzzled studying of an unfolded map as they stand motionless trying to understand where they are and how to get to where they want to be. But in the spiritual life, there are no maps. How does the spiritual stranger (or pilgrim) find the way to his desired end? Independent travelers, who tend to shun constant reference to maps, are constrained to learn enough of the foreign language to be able to ask questions about desired goals from local people. But the world is no friend of God's pilgrim children. The world, at enmity with God,¹⁹² offers little guidance in the way to please God. But the commandments of the LORD are foundational to any spiritual pilgrimage. So, the psalmist's plea is really a plea for guidance in the way because he is a stranger in the earth. He is looking for what Isaiah tells us can happen, "... thine ears shall hear a word behind thee, saying, 'This is the way, walk ye in it,' when ye turn to the right hand, and when ye turn to the left."¹⁹³ If, therefore, God hides His commandments from the stranger in the earth (the pilgrim of God), he is utterly lost. Here, again, we see the psalmist's sense of utter dependency on God. It is not just that he is asking for a

¹⁹¹ Jesus in John 4:23

¹⁹² Romans 8:7 "Because the carnal mind is enmity against God: for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be."

¹⁹³ Isaiah 30:21

refresher lesson in commandments that he has been taught from childhood, but a deeper understanding of how these revelations of God's will play out in his ever-changing life situation.

This verse adds a dimension of urgent utility that verse 18 only hinted at. The phrase "wondrous things out of thy law" could have referred to some treasured but not necessarily utilitarian insight to enrich the spiritual life of the psalmist. But taken together the pleas of 18a and 19a ("Open thou mine eyes, ... I am a stranger in the earth, Hide not ... from me.") paint the picture of a blind traveler in a hostile land who is in desperate need of the direction that God's word alone can provide. In Proverbs, we find a more extensive treatment in relation to this point: that a deep understanding of God's commandments is essential for spiritual direction.

"My son:

If thou wilt receive my words, and hide my commandments with thee; so that thou incline thine ear unto wisdom, and apply thine heart to understanding; yea, If thou criest after knowledge, and liftest up thy voice for understanding; If thou seekest her as silver, and searchest for her as for hid treasures;

Then shalt thou understand the fear of the LORD,
and find the knowledge of God.

For the LORD giveth wisdom: out of his mouth cometh knowledge and understanding. He layeth up sound wisdom for the righteous: he is a buckler to them that walk uprightly. He keepeth the paths of judgment, and preserveth the way of his saints. Then shalt thou understand righteousness, and judgment, and equity; yea, every good path."¹⁹⁴

The logic of this portion rests on the construct "if ... then ... for." "If" refers to the deliberate choice of the individual; "then" refers to the divinely appointed consequences of those choices; and "for" refers to the character of God as revealed by the choice/consequence relationships described by the "if-then" constructs. Note that the revelation of God's character is couched in four different views relative to walking on a path or way:

- He is a buckler to them that walk uprightly.
- He keepeth the paths of judgment.
- He preserveth the way of his saints.
- He gives understanding of every good path.

Underlying the commandments, of course are the two great commandments to love of God and of neighbor. But the love that undergirds the commandments is a sacrificial love. No wonder then if for the Christian believer whose "ears shall hear a word behind

¹⁹⁴ Proverbs 2:1-9

them, saying, ‘This is the way, walk ye in it’” discovers that the way enjoined is the way of the cross.

Identity in Relationship

^{19a} I am a stranger in the earth:

...

²³ Princes also did sit and speak against me:

But thy servant did meditate in thy statutes.



In this octave the psalmist makes the first two statements about his identity as he perceives it. “I am a stranger” (19a) and I am “thy servant.”(23b)¹⁹⁵ Late in His ministry, Jesus asked two related questions concerning His identity, “Who do men say that I the Son of Man am?” and “Whom say ye that I am?”¹⁹⁶ The answer to the first was that some said, superstitiously, that Jesus was John the Baptist come back from the dead. Others said Elijah, Jeremiah, or one of the prophets. There was basis for such answers in the nature of Jesus’ prophetic office. They were not exactly wrong. Jesus did exercise a true prophetic role. Moses had forewarned the people of Him. “For Moses truly said unto the fathers, A prophet shall the Lord your God raise up unto you of your brethren, like unto me; him shall ye hear in all things whatsoever he shall say unto you.”¹⁹⁷ But the answers people gave were not so much wrong as they were shallow and inadequate. Peter, in answering the second question, gives the deep answer, “Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God.” Peter knows who he is dealing with. Peter’s answer goes beyond seeing Jesus as just another prophet or king, teacher or reformer. Jesus is not person among many similar people. Peter in effect says what was perhaps beyond his thinking at that time, that Jesus, as the Messiah, the Son of the living God, is in a class by Himself. He is not just another prophet, priest, or king. He is not just another type of someone else. He is the Great Antitype, the one of Whom every true prophet, priest or king ever ‘spoke’ as a type.

A correct relationship necessitates that we have both a correct understanding of the person with whom we are relating and of ourselves. These perceptions are inseparably

¹⁹⁵ Although the psalmist makes 8 statements “I am”, (19, 63, 83, 94, 107, 120, 125, and 141), five of them are situational or descriptive of his feelings and only three of them pertain strictly to his perception of identity. Interestingly, that identity is perceived from within three different contexts: the world of humanity, “I am a stranger in the earth” (19); the community of faith, “I am a companion of them that fear thee” (63); and God’s ‘view’, “I am thy servant” (125).

¹⁹⁶ Matthew 16:13 -18 “When Jesus came into the coasts of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, saying, ‘Who do men say that I the Son of man am?’ And they said, ‘Some say that thou art John the Baptist: some, Elias; and others, Jeremias, or one of the prophets.’ He saith unto them, ‘But whom say ye that I am?’ And Simon Peter answered and said, ‘Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God.’ And Jesus answered and said unto him, ‘Blessed art thou, Simon Barjona: for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven. And I say also unto thee, that thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.’

¹⁹⁷ Acts 3:22, see also Acts 7:37

linked. To know who Jesus is, is to know who we are in relation to Him. It for this reason that Jesus immediately says to Simon, "And I say also unto thee, that thou art Peter." If we accept that Jesus is THE Way¹⁹⁸ (i.e. the antitype of which every true way is the type) then we are pilgrims (i.e. people of THE Way). If we accept that Jesus is THE Good Shepherd¹⁹⁹ (i.e. the antitype of which every good shepherd is the type) then we are the "sheep of His pasture"²⁰⁰ If we accept that Jesus is THE Older Brother²⁰¹ then we are all brothers and sisters in Christ. Many such comparisons are possible.²⁰²

As we look at the psalmist's self-perception, we catch a glimpse of who he believes he is related to. Clearly for him, this world is not his home. He is a stranger. This reality is attested to by the fact that princes who "sit" in positions of authority speak against him. The psalmist is referring, most likely, to local elders who sat by the gate of ancient walled cities to watch the strangers as they entered and to pass on their status of friend or foe. These who were at home in this wilderness town attest to his threatening identity. Perhaps theirs was simply Xenophobia that characterizes so much of our life today. But I believe that it goes deeper. The psalmist is reminding us that this present world is no friend to God's servants. Here we see a picture. We have the wilderness, the princes who sit in the gate of a fortified city, the pilgrim who has just entered on his way, and the faithful companion of the stranger: the emblem of his desert wanderings - his camel. The wilderness is the home of these naysayers but not the stranger and pilgrim.²⁰³ It is his schoolhouse, as it was for Abraham, John the Baptist, and the Apostle Paul. The princes sit very comfortably as they criticize this passing stranger. But he must be ever moving on, ever vigilant of the way and the judgments of God that are his sole defense against misstep, the statutes of God which are his "food for thought"²⁰⁴, and the testimonies of God that are his constant delight. And it is his camel that bears him on his way; that supplies him his daily bread; that accompanies him in the darkness of desertion, and comforts him in the valley of the shadow of death. For us, who were never been constrained to wander in this world's waste places, the camel is just another creature of God's creation. But for the true wanderer in the physical waste

¹⁹⁸ John 14:6 "Jesus saith unto him, 'I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me.'"

¹⁹⁹ John 10:11 "I am the good shepherd: the good shepherd giveth his life for the sheep."

²⁰⁰ Psalm 100:3 Know ye that the LORD he is God: it is he that hath made us, and not we ourselves; we are his people, and the sheep of his pasture.

²⁰¹ Romans 8:29 For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren.

²⁰² ... Comparisons that tell us about our relationship with Jesus: Light - Truth / Disciples I John 1:5, John 14:6 ; Word / Believer John 1:1, Galatians 6:10; Life / Child of God John 14:6; Heir / Joint heirs Romans 8:7; Holy / Saints I Peter 1:16; Great Physician / Patients Luke 5:31; Captain of our salvation / Soldiers Hebrews 2:10; Bride groom / Bride John 3:29; Vine / Branches John 15:1-10; Master / Stewards Luke 12:42-48; High Priest - Prince / Royal priesthood Hebrews 8:1; Chief Corner stone / Living stones I Peter 2:4-8

²⁰³ These two thoughts are linked in the story of the Bible, from Abraham and all that followed as strangers and pilgrims (Hebrews 11:13 "These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off, and were persuaded of them, and embraced them, and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth.") to Pewter's characterization of the Church (1 Peter 2:11 "Dearly beloved, I beseech you as strangers and pilgrims, abstain from fleshly lusts, which war against the soul...").

²⁰⁴ There is a progression here in regard to God's statutes. In Aleph he lamented over not keeping those statutes. In Beth, he pleaded Teach me your statutes. And here he does his part by reflecting on those statutes.

places of this earth, the camel is life itself. The Bedouin knows concretely his utter dependency on his camel. In the wilderness his life hangs by a thread. Without his camel, he will surely die. So, Gimel, in presenting us with the camel, does not simply present Jesus as another friend who accompanies and helps us on our pilgrim way, bearing our many burdens. That is true enough, but inadequately shallow. Gimel tells us of the great antitype of whom every camel that ever helped save the life of a wilderness traveler ever spoke. What a comfort to have Jesus as our companion in the way of our pilgrimage.

The Unbearable Burden

- ¹⁷ Deal bountifully with thy servant,
That I may live, and keep thy word
- ¹⁸ Open thou mine eyes,
That I may behold wondrous things out of thy law
- ¹⁹ I am a stranger in the earth:
Hide not thy commandments from me.
- ²⁰ My soul breaketh for the longing
That it hath unto thy judgments at all times.



It is easier to understand the meaning of verse 20 if we look at it in the context of the other verses in this first half of the third octave. This section involves three prayers that are all related. The first prayer asking God to “deal bountifully” is explained by the other two: “Open thou mine eyes that I may behold ... thy law ... hide not thy commandments from me.” The bounty that the psalmist seeks is not material but spiritual. He knows that he lives not by bread alone but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God.²⁰⁵ He reminds God of just who he is. In the world of men (“in the earth”) he is a stranger. The world is not his friend. In the divine economy he is “thy servant” (17a, 23b). God has a responsibility to this one who has left fellowship with the world²⁰⁶ behind in order to follow and to serve Him. His prayer rests on two reasons, one external and one internal. Externally, he is a stranger in the earth and therefore in need of directions that the world cannot provide. Internally, he is God’s servant whose soul “breaketh for the longing that it hath unto thy judgments at all times.” The meaning of this verse is somewhat obscured by the translation of the two words

²⁰⁵ Deuteronomy 8:3 “And he humbled thee, and suffered thee to hunger, and fed thee with manna, which thou knewest not, neither did thy fathers know; that he might make thee know that man doth not live by bread only, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of the LORD doth man live.” This passage was quoted by Jesus during His temptation in the wilderness “But he answered and said, It is written, Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God.” (Matthew 4:4)

²⁰⁶ James 4:4 “Ye adulterers and adulteresses, know ye not that the friendship of the world is enmity with God? Whosoever therefore will be a friend of the world is the enemy of God.”

“breaketh” and “longing.” The first word is גָּרַס garac (pronounced gaw-ras') a primitive root meaning to crush; or intransitively and figuratively to dissolve, to break. It is a rare word used only twice (here and in Lamentations 3:16).²⁰⁷ The word longing is תַּאֲבָה ta'abah (pronounced tah-ab-aw') from תַּאֲבָה ta'ab, a primitive root, meaning to desire, hence to desire or long for. The psalmist seems to be telling God that his soul is being crushed by a burden that is both unbearable (“my soul breaketh”) and constant (“at all times”). His is a continual desire for the judgments of God. Such plea suggests the presence of a great interior burden that will crush the life out of him unless God quickly answers his initial prayer “Deal bountifully with thy servant, that I may live.” In a very roundabout way the psalmist is saying, in effect, I can’t live without you.

The notion of an unbearable burden in the octave marked by גִּמֵּל Gimel – the Camel, is paradoxical. How can it be that the stranger – pilgrim – servant (who speaks to us of our spiritual pilgrimage) has a camel (which speaks to us of our Lord Jesus Christ as our burden bearer) finds that he has a burden that his camel cannot bear and that he must bear it alone. And how can it be that such a burden is so profoundly immense as to be crushing the life out of him unless God deals bountifully, opens his eyes in wonder at His law, hides not His commandments and (in effect) makes manifest His judgments that the psalmist’s soul is dying of longing for? What kind of a load is this? Certainly, our Lord has borne many burdens for us, our sorrow and grief,²⁰⁸ our sin and guilt,²⁰⁹ our daily cares,²¹⁰ and our many weaknesses.²¹¹ What burden then will He not bear for us. The psalmist tells us plainly: the burden of our longing, our desire, for God: the burden of our love. The foundation of all God’s commands is love. “Jesus said unto him, ‘Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself. On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets.’”²¹² The core of all service to God is love. “And now, Israel, what doth the LORD thy God require of thee, but to fear the LORD thy God, to walk in all his ways, and to love him, and to serve the LORD thy God with all thy heart and with all thy soul ...”²¹³

If we consider God’s eternal purpose for us, the necessity of this state of soul becomes obvious. “... he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world, that we

²⁰⁷ Lamentations 3:16 He hath also broken (גָּרַס garac) my teeth with gravel stones, he hath covered me with ashes.

²⁰⁸ Isaiah 53:4 “Surely he hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows: yet we did esteem him stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted.”

²⁰⁹ 1 Peter 2:24a “Who his own self bare our sins in his own body on the tree, ...”

²¹⁰ 1 Peter 5:6-7 “Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God, that he may exalt you in due time: casting all your care upon him; for he careth for you.”

²¹¹ 2 Corinthians 12:7-9 And lest I should be exalted above measure through the abundance of the revelations, there was given to me a thorn in the flesh, the messenger of Satan to buffet me, lest I should be exalted above measure. For this thing I besought the Lord thrice, that it might depart from me. And he said unto me, My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness. Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me.

²¹² Matthew 22:37 - 40

²¹³ Deuteronomy 10:12

should be holy and without blame before him in love: Having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself, according to the good pleasure of his will, To the praise of the glory of his grace, wherein he hath made us accepted in the beloved.”²¹⁴ If God’s great eternal purpose involves our being “in love” with Him, is it any wonder that the burden of that love should not be felt now?

Finishing the Job

²¹ Thou hast rebuked the proud that are cursed,
Which do err from thy commandments.

²² Remove from me reproach and contempt;
For I have kept thy testimonies.



These two verses begin the second portion of the third octave. That portion surveys the unfriendly world in which the psalmist’s sojourn lies. It is a world populated by proud people in positions of authority who are hostile to him and to God. But that world is not out of God’s sovereign dominion. The whole earth abides under His governance and though the heathen in it may rage against Him, “He that sitteth in the heavens shall laugh.”²¹⁵ The people of verse 21 are not only proud but cursed. Furthermore, God has rebuked them because they have erred in their ignoring of His commandments by their sinful practices.²¹⁶ One of those practices was to speak against the psalmist because he was God’s servant (23). He has felt the sting of their “reproach and contempt.” So, verse 22, (the second prayer of this octave) is not directed toward the psalmist’s need of God’s bountiful provision, but towards his vindication. Looking at these two verses together, the reader has the sense that God has acted in cursing and rebuking the proud, but that the psalmist wants more to be done. It is not enough that the enemies of God should be judged and condemned but His servants should be vindicated. The LORD has begun the work has begun but not completed it.

The psalmist, in pleading that God “Remove from me reproach and contempt”, is

²¹⁴ Ephesians 1:4-6

²¹⁵ Psalm 2:2-5

The kings of the earth set themselves, and
The rulers take counsel together,
against the LORD, and
Against his anointed, saying,
Let us break their bands asunder, and
Cast away their cords from us.
He that sitteth in the heavens shall laugh:
The Lord shall have them in derision.
Then shall he speak unto them in his wrath, and
Vex them in his sore displeasure.

²¹⁶ The word translated erred is שָׁגָה shagah, (pronounced shaw-gaw') a primitive root; meaning to stray, cause to be misled, to mistake, (morally) to transgress and by extension (through the idea of intoxication) to reel, to cause to go astray, to sin through ignorance, to make to wander.

asking Him to complete the work already begun. 22b advances a justification for this further action by way of a contrast between the psalmist's behavior and the behavior of the proud. They "err from thy commandments" (21b) but "I have kept thy testimonies" (22b). In citing the contrasting behaviors, the psalmist is arguing that he deserves better treatment and may be implying that he should receive a contrary treatment than those who spoke against him. If they are cursed, he should be blessed. If they are rebuked, he should be praised. But if blessing and praise are not to be forthcoming, then, at least, God should "remove from me reproach and contempt."

The point at issue here is vindication, an important aspect of our sense of justice. If someone has been maligned, their reputation falsely impugned and slandered, then they have a right to not only vindication but to a punitive compensation for the redress of their grievances. Our age abounds in such legal suits. But the redress that the psalmist seeks can only come from God not men. And there seems to be a delay again between God's actions with the wicked (21) and God's action on behalf of the grieving psalmist. We sense a certain measure of impatience on the part of the psalmist with God's timing. The words of Jesus bear on this very situation of the slander of the wicked against His people. "Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake. Rejoice, and be exceeding glad: for great is your reward in heaven: for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you."²¹⁷ Notice that He does not say that those who suffer such calumny will be vindicated on earth, only that they will have great reward in heaven. What is the purpose, then, of such a delay? Why does God suffer the plaint of His people; "How long, O Lord, holy and true, dost thou not judge and avenge our blood on them that dwell on the earth."²¹⁸ The slowness with which God may "remove from me reproach and contempt" is a spiritual trial that gives the individual believer an opportunity to choose between self-justification and God's justification. The whole of the saving work of Jesus is, in one sense, focused on our justification, not with man, but with God. "Jesus our Lord ... was raised again for our justification."²¹⁹ Choosing to justify ourselves, in a sense, moots the benefit of Christ's finished work on our behalf. "Christ is become of no effect unto you, whosoever of you are justified by the law"²²⁰

²¹⁷ Matthew 5:11-12

²¹⁸ Revelation 6:9 - 10 And when he had opened the fifth seal, I saw under the altar the souls of them that were slain for the word of God, and for the testimony which they held: And they cried with a loud voice, saying, How long, O Lord, holy and true, dost thou not judge and avenge our blood on them that dwell on the earth?

²¹⁹ Romans 4:20-25 He (*i.e. Abraham*) staggered not at the promise of God through unbelief; but was strong in faith, giving glory to God; And being fully persuaded that, what he had promised, he was able also to perform. And therefore it was imputed to him for righteousness. Now it was not written for his sake alone, that it was imputed to him; But for us also, to whom it shall be imputed, if we believe on him that raised up Jesus our Lord from the dead; Who was delivered for our offences, and was raised again for our justification.

²²⁰ One may view the life experience of the Apostle Paul in the light of this choice. For years as a Pharisee, he was convinced that he could be justified with God by the keeping of the law. It is a very attractive fallacy. Paul, of course work through to a correct choice that he describes in Romans 7 & 8. But the Galatian believers were tempted with the same specious doctrine of self justification by keeping the law the initiation of which process lay in the Jewish covenantal practice of circumcision. So Paul remonstrates with them in Galatians 5:2 -4 "Behold, I Paul say unto you, that if ye be circumcised, Christ shall profit you nothing. For I testify again to

While the choice may seem monumental and heroic, it is far more common than we realize. In fact, we encounter the temptation to justify ourselves quite often and more often than not we choose to speak up unwisely in our own defense. Once recognized, the opportunity to patiently await God's justification becomes an ongoing opportunity that develops our trust in God's wise bestowment. "... if, when ye do well, and suffer for it, ye take it patiently, this is acceptable with God. For even hereunto were ye called: because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that ye should follow his steps: Who did no sin, neither was guile found in his mouth: Who, when he was reviled, reviled not again; when he suffered, he threatened not; but committed himself to him that judgeth righteously:"²²¹

Avoiding Distraction

- ²¹ Thou hast rebuked the proud that are cursed,
Which do err from thy commandments.
- ²² Remove from me reproach and contempt;
For I have kept thy testimonies.
- ²³ Princes also did sit and speak against me:
But thy servant did meditate in thy statutes.



The second half of this octave presents two descriptions of verbal abuse directed at the psalmist: the reproach and contempt of the proud (21-22a) and the princes speaking against him (23). It may be that these were two separate events. The psalmist does say after mentioning the reproach and contempt that accosted him that the princes ALSO spoke against him. We might infer that whoever the proud were, the psalmist had an expectation that he might receive better treatment from the "princes" but was disappointed when they too joined the chorus of verbal abuse. All humans have fundamental needs including the need to be accepted and understood, to be respected as persons. And when that fundamental need is unmet, when verbal abuse takes the place of loving verbal support, it is a hard blow to the soul. "Reproach hath broken my heart; and I am full of heaviness: and I looked for some to take pity, but there was none; and for comforters, but I found none."²²² What is interesting and instructive, however, is the psalmist's response to the chorus of abuse. We have considered his prayer: "remove from me reproach and contempt" (22a) and its justification: "For I have kept thy testimonies" (22b). But prayer was not the only thing the psalmist did in response to hurtful verbal abuse on all fronts. When it became obvious to him that even the princes were joining the chorus, he meditated on the statutes of God. For him such an action

every man that is circumcised, that he is a debtor to do the whole law. Christ is become of no effect unto you, whosoever of you are justified by the law; ye are fallen from grace.

²²¹ 1 Peter 2:20b-23

²²² Psalm 69:20

was an affirmation of his status of a servant of the most-high God.²²³ “But thy servant did meditate in thy statutes.” There is a great spiritual lesson revealed in his choice. As noted in previously, the psalmist makes a choice not to justify himself; not to defend himself against their calumny; not to speak out against those who reviled him. But in verse 23b, he tells us what he chose to do instead: to meditate on the will of God as revealed in His statutes, to think about God’s rules for living. Not only does this affirm his servant role, but it keeps him from being distracted from the real business of life: to serve God, not defend self. What is at issue here is the direction of the inner eye, the eye of the heart. The choice regarding the direction of his gaze underlies both his prayer and his resolve to meditate instead of machinate. A true servant of God keeps his eyes on his master.²²⁴ A hireling does not. A true servant is concerned with his Master’s will (His statutes). A hireling runs for cover.²²⁵ Here is a discipline with an immediate positive benefit for our own spiritual lives: the discipline of avoiding spiritual distractions.

Perhaps we remember the old childhood rhyme; “Sticks and stones may break my bones, but names will never hurt me.” What is true physically may not be true spiritually. Being called names, suffering reproach, calumny, being spoken against not only hurts emotionally, but can also hurt us spiritually if we let the verbal fireworks distract us from the business in hand: doing our Master’s will. We may better understand this if we consider that meditation is an interior process while the verbal abuse was an external event outside the psalmist. In choosing to meditate, he chooses interior action instead of exterior reaction. The outside life rests upon our five senses. He hears what they are saying about him. He sees their faces contorted in disdain or puffed in pride. He smells their garlic laden invective. But the interior life is closed to the physical senses. The interior life of fellowship with God is possible only by faith. “Without faith it is impossible to please him: for he that cometh to God must believe

²²³ Acts 16:17 “The same followed Paul and us, and cried, saying, “These men are the servants of the most high God, which show unto us the way of salvation.””

²²⁴ Psalm 123 comments well on this state of affairs:

Unto thee lift I up mine eyes,
O thou that dwellest in the heavens.
Behold, as the eyes of servants look unto the hand of their masters, and
As the eyes of a maiden unto the hand of her mistress;
So our eyes wait upon the LORD our God,
Until that he have mercy upon us.
Have mercy upon us, O LORD, have mercy upon us:
For we are exceedingly filled with contempt
Our soul is exceedingly filled with the scorning of those that are at ease, and
With the contempt of the proud

²²⁵ The sufferings of the psalmist as a true servant of God as opposed to a hireling point to another who, when he was reviled for righteousness sake, “reviled not again; when he suffered, he threatened not; but committed himself to him that judges righteously” (1 Peter 2:23) He it was who said, “I am the good shepherd: the good shepherd giveth his life for the sheep. But he that is an hireling, and not the shepherd, whose own the sheep are not, seeth the wolf coming, and leaveth the sheep, and fleeth: and the wolf catcheth them, and scattereth the sheep. The hireling fleeth, because he is a hireling, and careth not for the sheep. I am the good shepherd, and know my sheep, and am known of mine.”

that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him."²²⁶ In choosing to meditate on God's statutes, the psalmist chooses to walk by faith not by sight.²²⁷ The visible world around us constitutes a constant solicitation to do otherwise and it takes real discipline to stay focused on God by faith. It is not only the wailing of the world against us, but the wooing of it as well that can distract. Wealth, fame, possessions, praise of men and a hundred other wafted promises would all bid fair to woo us from God. It was with such a ploy that Satan tempted our Lord Jesus. "Again, the devil taketh him up into an exceeding high mountain, and showeth him all the kingdoms of the world, and the glory of them; and saith unto him, 'All these things will I give thee, if thou wilt fall down and worship me.' Then saith Jesus unto him, 'Get thee hence, Satan: for it is written, Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve.'"²²⁸ Of people like those who tempted the psalmist, our Lord said, "They are like unto children sitting in the marketplace, and calling one to another, and saying, we have piped unto you, and ye have not danced; we have mourned to you, and ye have not wept."²²⁹ Whether we woo or wail, they complain, you don't jump through our hoops. "Yes", says the psalmist by his silence, "I serve the LORD not you." What Jesus said; what the psalmist says; we should labor to say as well: I serve the LORD not you.

Consolation and Counsel

²³ Princes also did sit and speak against me:
But thy servant did meditate in thy statutes.

²⁴ Thy testimonies also are my delight
And my counselors



In the previous verses, we considered how the psalmist heard the contemptuous reproach of the proud and the nay-sayings of the princes who also spoke against him. Rather than respond to external voices, however, he chose an interior course of action, to meditate in thy statutes. We might think that the dialogue ended there. This last verse of the octave tells us, however, that there is another set of speakers to offset the proud and the princes: God's statutes and also God's testimonies have spoken to the psalmist in response to the enquiries of his meditation. He calls these: "my counselors." Their voice is neither the raucous reproach of the proud, nor the adversarial orations of the princes, but the voice of God about how things should be in this world (His statutes), how they actually are and how they will be in the world to come (His testimonies). In choosing to live an interior life, the psalmist tells us, in effect, that he has opened

²²⁶ Hebrews 11:6

²²⁷ 2 Corinthians 5:6 -9 Therefore we are always confident, knowing that, whilst we are at home in the body, we are absent from the Lord: (for we walk by faith, not by sight). We are confident, I say, and willing rather to be absent from the body, and to be present with the Lord. Wherefore we labor, that, whether present or absent, we may be accepted of him.

²²⁸ Matthew 4:8 - 10

²²⁹ Luke 7:32

himself to hear the voice of God as opposed to the voices of men! He testifies that God's voice to him is a life-saving delight. In the world he has encountered tribulation and opposition from prince and pauper alike, but he is of good cheer because in choosing to live the inner life he has overcome the world.²³⁰ He has chosen that better part which will not be taken away from him.²³¹

It should be of great interest to us to determine the exact source of our spiritual consolations or comforts. Spiritual pilgrimage can be hard on the soul, but the sweetness of the word of God certainly goes a long way to delight and to revive the weary soul. Nor is the psalmist's delight restricted to God's statutes and His testimonies. All that God utters within his soul is as honey to his spiritual taste. "How sweet are thy words unto my taste! Yea, sweeter than honey to my mouth!"²³² Furthermore there is great spiritual benefit in God's words. His "pleasant words are as an honeycomb, sweet to the soul, and health to the bones."²³³

There are, of course, consolations or comforts to be found in the world around us, which are not ill-intentioned. But exterior comforts ("delights") can be deceptive. Good food and serviceable raiment, human contact with 'kindred spirits' are all comforts for the pilgrim. But all they can become the tools of malevolent manipulators that would either woo us away from living an interior life of devotion or threaten us with their deprivation if we do not leave off our spiritual pursuits. The latter was the case with the psalmist.²³⁴ The former was the case (as we have noted) with our Lord Jesus in the wilderness when the adversary tempted Him with all the allurements of the world's comforts and vain glory to forsake His devotion to His Father in Heaven.

But the psalmist also makes the bold assertion that God's statutes and testimonies are his "counselors." The real danger in any pilgrimage is getting lost along the way. In ancient times, local people probably knew more about their immediate surroundings (how to find water or pasture or a safe way to this place or that) than some stranger who was just passing through for the first time. So, he had to ask for the locals for directions regarding the way: pitfalls, dead ends, dangerous regions where he could slip and fall, as well as the way to the next town or caravanserai. When he arrived safely at the next way station, the process of asking directions would begin all over again with a new set of locals. This method works very well as long as everyone cooperates. But like any chain, it is only as strong as its weakest link. In this "village" the psalmist found not a weak link but a broken one. His need was not just for supplies (Deal

²³⁰ John 16:33 These things I have spoken unto you, that in me ye might have peace. In the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world.

²³¹ Luke 10:42 But one thing is needful: and Mary hath chosen that good part, which shall not be taken away from her.

²³² Psalm 119:103

²³³ Proverbs 16:24

²³⁴ Hence his plea: "Deal bountifully with thy servant, that I may live, and keep thy word." The world into which he had come with his camel had no intention of giving him anything to support his journey. So, he was cast upon the grace of God as his plea makes clear.

bountifully with thy servant, that I may live) but for direction (counselors). If we view the physicality of geographic pilgrimage as a paradigm for spiritual pilgrimage, then we easily recognize that the needs are the same: spiritual food and drink for the way and direction in the way. The spiritual pilgrim needs both sustenance (which is his delight) and wise counsel or spiritual direction. While the world may provide some of the former on the material level, it can provide nothing of the latter, because the present world system has an ancient and murderous enmity toward God and His people.²³⁵ The choice of the psalmist, then, to live his life interiorly with God as opposed to exteriorly with men is a choice between God (Who loves him) and God's committed enemies (who hate Him). There is no middle ground.²³⁶

But the psalmist gives us much hope by telling us that there is spiritual direction available for God's pilgrims and that he has found it! Finding spiritual direction involves: 1) **Constant love of God's word** ("My soul breaketh for the longing that it hath unto thy judgments at all times"), 2) **Reading God's word** ("Open thou mine eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of thy law."), 3) **Prayer for God's enlightenment** ("Hide not thy commandments from me"), 4) **Meditation** ("Thy servant did meditate in thy statutes"), and 5) **Praise of God's goodness** ("Thy testimonies also are my delight and my counselors").²³⁷ Of course there are fellow pilgrims who have gone before us and their testimonies, like that of the psalmist himself, have been preserved of God for our comfort and counsel.²³⁸ We do well to heed their wise counsel as well.

²³⁵ On enmity between man and God there are three references that seem appropriate:

Genesis 3:14a...15 "And the LORD God said unto the serpent. ... I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel." (the first messianic prophesy)

Romans 8:5 - 8 "For they that are after the flesh do mind the things of the flesh; but they that are after the Spirit the things of the Spirit. For to be carnally minded is death; but to be spiritually minded is life and peace. Because the carnal mind is enmity against God: for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be. So then they that are in the flesh cannot please God."

James 4:1- 4 From whence come wars and fightings among you? Come they not hence, even of your lusts that war in your members? Ye lust, and have not: ye kill, and desire to have, and cannot obtain: ye fight and war, yet ye have not, because ye ask not. Ye ask, and receive not, because ye ask amiss, that ye may consume it upon your lusts. Ye adulterers and adulteresses, know ye not that the friendship of the world is enmity with God? Whosoever therefore will be a friend of the world is the enemy of God.

²³⁶ Hence our Lord Jesus' warning, "No man can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon." (Matthew 6:24)

²³⁷ These are roughly the five elements of the ancient Christian practice of *Lectio Divina*.

²³⁸ 1 Corinthians 10:1-6, 11-12 "Moreover, brethren, I would not that ye should be ignorant, how that all our fathers were under the cloud, and all passed through the sea; And were all baptized unto Moses in the cloud and in the sea; And did all eat the same spiritual meat; And did all drink the same spiritual drink: for they drank of that spiritual Rock that followed them: and that Rock was Christ. But with many of them God was not well pleased: for they were overthrown in the wilderness. Now these things were our examples, to the intent we should not lust after evil things, as they also lusted. ... Now all these things happened unto them for ensamples: and they are written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the world are come. Wherefore let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall.

⌈ (DALETH)

☞ The Confession of Sin and the Prayer for Life ☛

- ²⁵ My soul cleaveth unto the dust:
 Quicken thou me according to thy word
- ²⁶ I have declared my ways, and thou heardest me:
 Teach me thy statutes.
- ²⁷ Make me to understand the way of thy precepts:
 So shall I talk of thy wondrous works

☞ The Confession of Weakness and the Prayer for Strength ☛

- ²⁸ My soul melteth for heaviness:
 Strengthen thou me according unto thy word
- ²⁹ Remove from me the way of lying: and
 Grant me thy law graciously
- ³⁰ I have chosen the way of truth:
 Thy judgments have I laid before me
- ³¹ I have stuck unto thy testimonies:
 O LORD, put me not to shame
- ³² I will run the way of thy commandments,
 When thou shalt enlarge my heart



⌈ - Daleth means a door. A door speaks of an obstacle and an opportunity. The door (gate, portcullis, portal, chain across the road, etc.) is the intersection of a way with a wall, or boundary, fence, perimeter, etc. If there were no door, the road would stop at the fence. Doors or their equivalent are situated where the individual (who has authority over the place or domain which is surrounded by the boundary, fence, perimeter, or firewall) wishes to permit passage through the barrier that defines his space or domain. While the wall or fence signifies dominion over a place, the door represents the owner's control which permits him or others he chooses to enter through his barrier. He may open or close and (presumably) no one countervenes his decision. Their authority over a door is symbolized by a key, another powerful image. Hence, we have the picture of Jesus who says to the little assembly at Philadelphia, "These things saith he that is holy, he that is true, he that hath the key of David, he that openeth, and no man shutteth; and shutteth, and no man openeth; I know thy works: behold, I have set before thee an open door, and no man can shut it: for thou hast a little strength, and hast kept my word, and hast not denied my name."²³⁹

The door looks back on the road already traveled and forward to the road ahead. It represents a halt in the pathway of blessing. In the way of seeking and finding, it

²³⁹ Revelation 3:7-8

represents an opportunity to knock and keep on knocking and to pray with perseverance for entrance or passage. Looking back there is repentance for our way having been out of God's will. Looking ahead there is faith that God will lead us in His way and hope that we will find the desired end of our lives. Repentance and faith taken together are what conversion is all about.

But a door is not just an object in our way; we also experience a door by going through it. It speaks of our entering by it. We are creatures of place, and places are inevitably linked to the varied activities of our lives. We have places of employment and places of worship, places of business and places for recreation, places of transportation and parking. Every place where we may be, there is a human function that we normally associate with that place, even if it is doing nothing but sitting as in a park. Even in our homes we have different places for specific activities: kitchen, dining room, bathroom, bedroom etc. Furthermore "domains" may be conceptual as well as physical, as in today's social media. There we have "portals" and grant our "friends" "access." We experience doors as points of transition from one domain to another, from one place of activity to another. And we do not have a problem with this because we have the ability to function in a mode that is generally appropriate to the purposes of a particular place. For us a door represents a transition from one existential mode to another. Those transitions are for the most part reversible. The door marked "enter" as we go into the hardware store is generally the door marked "exit" as we leave.

Although we experience doors as transitions from one mode of existence to another, their existence is not what motivates us to use them. Necessity or desire moves us through them from one mode of existence to another. So, for example, because we have a need to gain money to buy necessities of life, we leave our home, enter our garage, get in our car, drive to work, park the car in the company lot, enter the plant, earn our wage, and then repeat the process in reverse order at the end of the work day. All of those transitions involve passing through doors: house doors, garage doors, car doors, parking lot gates, plant entrance doors, and office doors. And each passage marks a different mode of our existence: homeowner/pedestrian, pedestrian/automobile driver, automobile driver/pedestrian, pedestrian/employee, employee/technical specialist. But what motivates us to transition from one mode to another is a certain dissatisfaction (however transient) with the state in which we find ourselves compared to our desire to be in the next state which brings us closer to our goal state. It is this combination of dissatisfaction with our present mode of existence and desire for a better mode of existence that moves us through the next door to a different existential mode. If we go out to lunch and park the car, we are not content to walk around the parking lot. We were content to drive there, but we only pass through the car door so we can drive to the parking lot, in order to pass through the car door again in order to get through the parking lot in order to get to the door of the restaurant where we will satisfy our hunger.

Doors mark the moment of transition from one existential mode to another, but our motivation derives from dissatisfaction and desire.

What has all this to do with the psalmist? In this octave, the psalmist makes two assertions about his soul's existential state: My soul cleaveth to the dust and my soul melteth for heaviness. The one speaks metaphorically of death while the other speaks of lack of interior strength. We see these two together elsewhere in the Psalms. "My strength is dried up like a potsherd; and my tongue cleaveth to my jaws; and thou hast brought me into the dust of death."²⁴⁰ In each case, he follows the declaration with a plea; the first for life ("quicken thou me") and the second for strength ("strengthen thou me"). It is as if he is saying, I'm dying and there's nothing I can do about it. As we noted in discussing prayer in general, we can see both the psalmist's holy dissatisfaction with his actual state (death or dying, and weakness) and his holy desire for a better state (life and strength). But how is he to get from one state to another? The psalmist is looking for a door that leads him from one unsatisfactory state (death or dying, and weakness) to a desired state (life and strength). But these transitions of existential mode are not at all like those that we have been considering. Going to work and coming home each day happens over and over. But dying is irreversible, to all intents and purposes. They are not transitions, but transformations. The psalmist is looking for a door that transforms the nature of his existence from death to life (i.e. resurrection - mercy) and from weakness to strength (i.e. divine empowerment - grace).

The Bible tells us that "the wages of sin is death."²⁴¹ And it is death, in the form of separation from God because of his moral failure (sin), that he feels and fears.²⁴² He desires a new mode of existence (eternal life) from which there is no turning back. Godly sorrow for sin that works repentance marks just such a transformation, "for godly sorrow worketh repentance to salvation not to be repented of (*i.e. it is irreversible*): but the sorrow of the world worketh death."²⁴³ But every door had two sides. *Janus*-like,²⁴⁴ it looks back on the way past and it looks ahead on the way forward. It looks back on darkness and death but ahead to life and light. Faith, hope, and love as we noted also play a part in prayer. Faith attaches itself to God's word. The psalmist's prayer is "Quicken thou me according to thy word. ... Strengthen thou me according unto thy word." His hope is placed in God, because only God can transform sinful humanity. Only God can open the prison door of the sinner trapped by his fallen nature. Only God can open the door of the Red sea that bars the way from Pharaoh's slavery to God's service. When He opens no man can shut, and when He shuts, no man can open to go

²⁴⁰ Psalm 22:15

²⁴¹ Romans 6:23 For the wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.

²⁴² Psalm 119:8b O forsake me not utterly.

²⁴³ 2 Corinthians 7:10

²⁴⁴ Janus: in ancient Roman myth, Janus was the god of beginnings, gates, transitions, time, doorways, passages, and endings. He was usually depicted as having two faces since he looks to the future and to the past. It is conventionally thought that the month of January is named for him because it looks back to the year past and the year to come.

- From Wikipedia.

back again. His deliverance is irreversible. How then does God provide this irreversible entrance into the domain of blessedness? By means of THE Door! "For the wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord." Jesus tells His disciples, "... Verily, verily, I say unto you, I am the door of the sheep. ... I am the door: by me if any man enter in, he shall be saved, and shall go in and out, and find pasture."²⁴⁵ Repentance is knocking on the door in hope that someone will answer. Faith is turning the door knob in hope that it will open. And love is the irreversible joy that replaces sorrow forever, the light that replaces darkness forever, when the door actually does open for us as we hoped and we find life in God through Jesus Christ, life that alone can satisfy human longing irreversibly. When Nicodemus came to Jesus, the question that was on his heart (that our Lord answered, before he could ask it) was "How does a man enter the kingdom of heaven?"²⁴⁶ He was looking for a door in the heavenlies. Jesus is that door which Nicodemus sought and the door of which this passage speaks, the one by whom we enter into newness of life, eternal life.²⁴⁷

In verse 25 we have the attitude of the repentant sinner.²⁴⁸ The psalmist knocks on the door by confessing that he is in need of quickening. He knows he is dead in trespasses and sin (25a). He is cleaving to the dust of death and cries out to be resurrected by the Word of God (25b). The confession of his sins (26a – I have declared my ways) argues that he has finally come to his senses and is sufficiently aware his error and sin to rehearse them before God as part of the prayer that God has heard (26b). That confession has uprooted the noxious weed of ignorance that was rooted in the poisoned soil of self-will, leaving now a prepared heart that is ready to be instructed in "thy statutes" (26c - i.e. in a new set of rules for living) and a mind that is ready to be trained to think in new ways (27a – a mind which understands new precepts of living). For this he now pleads; "Teach me thy statutes and make me to understand the way of thy precepts." This octave begins with that miraculous moment of teach-ability that is so critical to the spiritual life. The psalmist knows that this can be a real turning point in his experience leading to his testimony "thy wondrous works."

But all is not over. The first taste of the LORD fills one with an insatiable hunger for more.²⁴⁹ The intensity of his sorrow for sin and his desire for God is melting²⁵⁰ him. If the

²⁴⁵ John 10:7,9

²⁴⁶ John 3

²⁴⁷ The image of a door also harks back to Beth. The heart has a door as well and Jesus tells us that He knocks at that door. "Behold, I stand at the door, and knock: if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me." (Revelation 3:20) If we think of the door as that of our heart; then in opening the heart's door to Jesus so that He comes in and communes with us, we can truly say "Thy Word (λογος) have I hid in mine heart" and we just as truly say that our hearts have become Beth-El, the house of God.

²⁴⁸ Luke 18:13 And the publican, standing afar off, would not lift up so much as his eyes unto heaven, but smote upon his breast, saying, God be merciful to me a sinner.

²⁴⁹ Psalm 34:8 "O taste and see that the LORD is good: blessed is the man that trusteth in him." It is a paradox of the spiritual life that the more we taste of God, the more we hunger for Him and the less we do so, the less we will hunger for Him. It is quite the opposite of material hunger which increases with want and decreases with satiety.

first cry: “my soul cleaveth unto the dust” brought forth the plea: “quicken thou me according to thy word”; here the second cry: “my soul melteth for heaviness” brings forth the plea: “Strengthen thou me according unto thy word.” We are reminded that “As ye have therefore received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk ye in him.”²⁵¹

Among the sins the psalmist has confessed as his ways is “the way of lying” (29a). He has confessed but the strength to repent he does not find within himself. He knows that he is weak through the flesh and is in need of spiritual strengthening according to God’s word.²⁵² But the psalmist also knows that faith is required as well as repentance, action as well as plea. So along with his three-fold plea: “Remove from me the way of lying (29a); grant me thy law graciously (29b); and put me not to shame²⁵³, O LORD (31b); he interweaves, a three-fold testimony of his actions taken in faith: “I have chosen the way of truth (30a); I have laid thy judgments before me (30b); and I have stuck unto thy testimonies” (31a). He knows that if God will honor his repentance and faith (his conversion) and grant grace (i.e. “enlarge my heart” 32b), then where once he cleaved to the dust unable to rise and melted with sorrow for sin and desire for God, he will at last “run the way of thy commandments” (32a) which he knows to be also “the way of truth” (30a).

What a difference, then, does this Daleth, this Door, look upon?

1. Before it a crushed sinner, cleaving to the dust of the death of his ways have brought him to, crying out to God for forgiveness, life and spiritual strength.
2. After it a victorious saint, running in the way of truth and the commandments of God by the grace of God.

What a transformation! Hallelujah! What a Savior!

²⁵⁰ דָּלַף dalaph, (pronounced daw-laf’) a primitive root meaning to drip; by implication, to weep or to melt the way a candle melts and drips wax under intense heat, to pour out. The internal strength of a melting candle no longer can support its upright position as a means of illumination.

²⁵¹ Colossians 2:6

²⁵² This is a most important lesson in itself and one which is central to the individual’s relation to the law. It will occur again throughout this psalm. Paul gives the classic description in Romans 7:14-21, 8:3 “For we know that the law is spiritual: but I am carnal, sold under sin. For that which I do I allow not: for what I would, that do I not; but what I hate, that do I. If then I do that which I would not, I consent unto the law that it is good. Now then it is no more I that do it, but sin that dwelleth in me. For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh,) dwelleth no good thing; for to will is present with me; but how to perform that which is good I find not. For the good that I would I do not: but the evil which I would not, that I do. Now if I do that I would not, it is no more I that do it, but sin that dwelleth in me. I find then a law, that, when I would do good, evil is present with me. ... For what the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh, God sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh.”

²⁵³ Shame, mentioned here, is a critical difference between repentance and remorse. Remorse involves sorrow for the inevitable consequences of sin, like getting caught and punished. It is still self-centered. Repentance, on the other hand, is more sorrow for grieving God and people who one has wronged. The difference between the two seems to involve shame for one’s actions. Remorseful people are not ashamed at being caught, only sorry. Repentant people are both sorry and ashamed for their hurtful actions. In this case, if psalmist’s choice of the way of truth is followed by his continuance in the way of lying, it would be a great shame to him, because his repentance would look more like remorse. So he pleads for grace not to continue in sin lest he be made to be ashamed.

Death and Life

25 My soul cleaveth unto the dust:
Quicken thou me according to thy word



This first verse of the fourth octave is redolent with suggestive imagery. The words “soul” and “dust” hark back to the story of the creation of man. “And the LORD God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul.”²⁵⁴ The shift from “dust” as the last word of 25a to “quicken” as the first word of 25b evoke the image of death and life, or resurrection, which is what the psalmist is, in effect, praying for. One also can sense an echo of the hand of God in executing the sentence of death for sin. “My strength is dried up like a potsherd; and my tongue cleaveth to my jaws; and **thou hast brought me into the dust of death**.”²⁵⁵ The transition from death to life (which is the reverse of our normal view of birth or life followed by death) reinforces the notion of the resurrection from the dead. “Therefore my heart is glad, and my glory rejoiceth: my flesh also shall rest in hope. For **thou wilt not leave my soul in hell**; neither wilt thou suffer thine Holy One to see corruption.”²⁵⁶ The imagery of death and life coupled with the notion of ׀ - daleth: the door, also points to a change of spiritual life from death caused by sin which separates from God to the newness of life with God; to repentance and faith; to conversion; of going through a door. The assertion “My soul cleaveth unto the dust” speaks to that repentance not to be repented of ²⁵⁷ while the prayer, “quicken thou me according to thy word,” speaks to faith (as in the prayer of faith ²⁵⁸).

Of all the thoughts that people entertain, the thought of their immanent death is perhaps one of the most difficult to deal with. What happens after I am dead? There is no possibility for the eye of the body or the eye of the mind to see beyond that universal veil at the end of everyone’s life. The eye of faith (the testimony of which many refuse to accept) alone can survey the possibilities of a blessed life beyond the grave. Nevertheless, there is much that the eye of reason strengthened by experience can see

²⁵⁴ Genesis 2:7

²⁵⁵ Psalm 22:15 The reference, of course, is to the sufferings of the Messiah – Jesus – but the humanity of His vicarious sufferings for sinners, also speak typically of the sufferings of all humanity.

²⁵⁶ Psalm 16:9-10 the word translated “hell” is שׂאֵל (pronounced sheh- ole' - sometimes translated as the grave or the pit) means Hades, a place of the dis-embodied dead, or the world of the dead as if in a subterranean retreat. The word is generally not associated with the notion of punishment or blessedness. It is not until the New Testament that we see the use of two words: γέννα (pronounced gheh'-en-nah) and αδης (pronounced hades). A Greek word of Hebrew origin γέννα means the valley of Hinnom; ge-henna (or Ge-Hinnom), a valley of Jerusalem, used (figuratively) as a name for the place (or state) of everlasting punishment:--hell. Its actual use it would have been more like the town dump, full of corruption, smell, worms, and fire. Αδης is formed from Α (a negative particle) and ; δης meaning unseen. "Hades" means the place (or state) of departed souls:--the grave, hell. The Apostle Peter in his Pentecost sermon quotes Psalm 16:9-10 and translates the word שׂאֵל (Sheh-ole) with Αδης (Hades).

²⁵⁷ 2 Corinthians 7:10 “...For godly sorrow worketh repentance to salvation not to be repented of: but the sorrow of the world worketh death.”

²⁵⁸ James 5:15 “And the prayer of faith shall save the sick, and the Lord shall raise him up; and if he have committed sins, they shall be forgiven him.”

regarding the issue of death followed by life of which this verse speaks. And its testimony does not contradict faith's view.

Death in one form or another is part of our everyday lives. In our lives, we see many times the decease of people and animals (often loved ones or loved pets). But death comes to us in immaterial ways as well, with effects are sometimes blessedly beneficial. In that sense repentance is itself a kind of death of old, inadequate, false, useless, and damaging notions that are replaced by more accurate apprehensions of the Truth. Our lives, going forward, no longer involve decisions based on fallacies, nor are they held back from making wise decisions based on the truth. In mid-life, there is a kind of death of childhood (childish?) dreams and aspirations that in some cases is followed by a more balanced view of ourselves and what it is that we really need to accomplish. It may be that some event has awakened us and freed us from a frustrating desire for the praise of men that heretofore constrained us to live lives that were a sham and not really who we were. Being disabused of such conceptual, emotional and volitional bondage, we find ourselves free to live new lives that are more authentic, more truthful. It is not that we cease caring, but rather that we began to care about different things that are more meaningful to our existence. Who, having experienced such a remarkable change, would fear the death (repentance) that ushered in that new, more authentic, more fulfilling way of life (faith)? It is in just such terms that Jesus describes the life that He offers his followers. "And he that taketh not his cross, and followeth after me, is not worthy of me. He that findeth his life shall lose it: and he that loses his life for my sake shall find it."²⁵⁹

There is a tendency on the part of some Christians to view repentance as part of a one-time event called "conversion." They are, of course, quite correct. But their truth is a partial one. Death and life are more than a one-time, mutually occurring, simultaneous event. They are also part of an ongoing spiritual process. Repentance and faith ("My soul cleaveth unto the dust - Quicken thou me according to thy word") are an ongoing spiritual process. Mortification and sanctification, putting off the old man and putting on the new man,²⁶⁰ are the essential description of what it means to live life as a Christian. It is Paul who (longing for this life) says, "That I may know him, and the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of his sufferings, being made conformable unto his death."²⁶¹

²⁵⁹ Matthew 10:38 - 39

²⁶⁰ Ephesians 4:22 - 24 That ye put off concerning the former conversation the old man, which is corrupt according to the deceitful lusts; And be renewed in the spirit of your mind. And that ye put on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness.

²⁶¹ Philippians 3:10

Open to Learn

²⁶ I have declared my ways, and thou heardest me:
Teach me thy statutes.

²⁷ Make me to understand the way of thy precepts:
So shall I talk of thy wondrous works.



These two verses mirror each other. ²⁶² The first begins with an act of confession: “I have declared my ways,” followed by a plea for instruction: “Teach me thy statutes.” The next verse (in reverse order) begins with a plea for instruction “Make me to understand the way of thy precepts” followed by another act of confession (which is promised) “so shall I talk of thy wondrous works.” These verses are more than mirror images, however. Just as teaching (26b) precedes understanding (27a) so too does the declaration of my ways (26a - confession) precede talking of God’s works (27b - testimony). The verses present a progression of action. The image of the door in this octave helps us to further understand this action. Not only does this door mark a transition from one state or domain to another (man’s lost state to the state of God’s governance of a quickened life); it also marks the intersection of two ways (my ways and the way of thy precepts). At the door, the psalmist’s declaration to God of “my ways” constitutes a confession of his life of self-direction and sin. Such a confession is entirely consistent with his state of hopelessness and desperation that we saw in verse 25a: “My soul cleaveth unto the dust.” The word that he believes will vivify or quicken him (25b – Quicken thou me according to thy word) is the word of instruction that he pleads for in these two verses: to be taught God’s statutes (26b) and to be made to understand His precepts (27a). Furthermore, he tells us that God has heard him (26a-2 “thou heardest me”). The picture of the door then helps us to understand the action suggested in these three verses. The psalmist has been going his own way trying, perhaps, to find a way into happy and harmonious fellowship with God, but failing. He has found the door, but has also realized his inability to enter. Unless the doorkeeper (God) hears his plea, he will surely die in his sins. So, he “knocks” on the door crying out for mercy and confessing the error and folly of his ways. God, Who doubtless has been waiting patiently for this moment, hears his plea and opens the door. As we noted earlier, we go through doors for a combination of two simple reasons: dissatisfaction with our state on one side of the door and desire to enter the state on the other side of the door. So, it is as if God has opened the door (having heard the psalmist’s dissatisfaction with “my ways”) and is enquiring what it is that psalmist desires. This enquiry he answers with the afore-mentioned two-fold plea for instruction, to the end that he might be able to declare the wondrous works of God and not his own miserable

²⁶² The Structure is ab:b'a' We call this “mirror image” set of ideas a Chiasm after the Greek letter X.

failures. What is of note here is the presence of time. The event being described is a moment in time, a truly teachable moment!

The presence of the concept of a teachable moment calls in question what we really mean by teaching. Today every day from nine to three is a time for teaching for younger children and from dawn to dusk for older ones. It takes hours, days, months and years to learn. But a teachable moment suggests that a different kind of learning is involved here. Today learning seems largely focused on what the ancient Greeks called *Praxis*. We learn in order to earn. We are educated so that we can acquire the skills and knowledge to earn a living thereby. But the learning suggested in these verses is closer to the antithesis of *Praxis*: *Theoria*.²⁶³ It is education focused not on doing but being; not so much to earn a living as living. The plea of 25b is “quicken me.” It is not support me economically. The dust of death (25a) is not for want of bread but for want of the Word of God (quicken me according to thy word).²⁶⁴ We might say, poetically that the teachable moment arises when we come to the end of our own way of living and begin to seek God’s way of living, “the way of thy precepts.” While the psalmist is doubtless thinking of a learning process that will go on for many years, perhaps the rest of his life, the importance of this opening of the door, this teachable moment cannot be overstated. Repentance and faith doubtless continue all through our life, but the fire of devotion which energizes that lifelong process must begin with a moment where the heart has been touched by the hand of God, when God graciously opens the door before us and asks, in effect, what do you want?²⁶⁵ And our hearts burn within us at the sound of His voice!²⁶⁶

²⁶³ *Theoria* in Latin is *Contemplatio*. In the spiritual vocabulary contemplation is restricted to the soul’s desire to focus on and gain a view of God, in contradistinction to meditation (*Meditatio*) which is reflection of the things of God as opposed to God, Himself. Both processes are hinted at in these three verses (25-27). The psalmist has doubtless considered his ways long before he could rehearse them to God in confession. God has often suggested meditation as a corrective for self-directed living:

Proverbs 14:12 “There is a way which seemeth right unto a man, but the end thereof are the ways of death.”

Deuteronomy 32:28- 29 “For they are a nation void of counsel, neither is there any understanding in them. O that they were wise, that they understood this, that they would consider their latter end!”

Haggai 1:5-7 “Now therefore thus saith the LORD of hosts; Consider your ways. Ye have sown much, and bring in little; ye eat, but ye have not enough; ye drink, but ye are not filled with drink; ye clothe you, but there is none warm; and he that earneth wages earneth wages to put it into a bag with holes. Thus saith the LORD of hosts; Consider your ways.”

But what the psalmist really desires is to see God Himself. “I have heard of thee by the hearing of the ear: but now mine eye seeth thee, wherefore I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes.” (Job 42:5-6) and again “I have set the LORD always before me” (Psalm 16:8a)

²⁶⁴ Our Lord Jesus’ answer to the adversary is exactly what is meant here. “Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God.” Matthew 4:4

²⁶⁵ We see an analogous picture in the lives of Andrew and John, who after hearing John the Baptist speak of Jesus, set off following Him. “And the two disciples heard him (*John the Baptist*) speak, and they followed Jesus. Then Jesus turned, and saw them following, and saith unto them, What seek ye? They said unto him, Rabbi, (which is to say, being interpreted, Master,) where dwellest thou? He saith unto them, Come and see. They came and saw where he dwelt, and abode with him that day: for it was about the tenth hour.” (John 1:37-39) Their learning process would go on for years, but it had a definite beginning when they were ready to learn, ready to follow in God’s ‘footsteps’.

²⁶⁶ “And they said one to another; ‘Did not our heart burn within us, while he talked with us by the way, and while he opened to us the scriptures?’” (Luke 24:32) One of the main reasons that the psalms are the perennial favorite in the devotional literature lies precisely here: that, when understood, they touch the heart in a way that no other book in the Bible does. It is supremely the book for those whose lives God has touched, whose hearts burn within them with devotion to God. We might even say that it is the hymnbook of the ‘Fellowship of the Burning Heart.’

Glory to God

²⁵ My soul cleaveth unto the dust:
Quicken thou me according to thy word.

²⁶ I have declared my ways, and thou
heardest me:
Teach me thy statutes.

²⁸ My soul melteth for heaviness:
Strengthen thou me according unto thy word.

²⁹ Remove from me the way of lying:
and
Grant me thy law graciously.



There is considerable parallelism between verses 25 and 26 that introduce the first half of this octave and verses 28 and 29 that introduce the second. In each case the psalmist cries out to God about the state of his soul. In the first it is death that concerns him. In the second it is lack of strength. The word “melteth” is דלף (pronounced daw-laf) a primitive root which means to drip; and, by implication, to weep, drop through, melt, or pour out. One has the picture of a wax candle that has begun to melt and can no longer stand erect under its own strength, or a roof that, because of neglect, is no longer able to bear its own weight and drops through. In both cases the psalmist seeks appropriate help (quicken thou me ... strengthen thou me) “according to thy word.” He has “declared his ways”²⁶⁷ and pleads that God would remove from him “the way of lying.” The help that he seeks from God’s word is clearly didactic in nature. “Teach me thy statutes ... Grant me thy law graciously.”

More than a lesson, however, it is clear that he desires that his teacher be God, Himself. Although he deals with these two aspects of his spiritual life in separate sections, they are not at all separate in our experience. It is manifest dying men have little or no strength to either cling to life or to continue living. In the context of ד, the door, we see a picture of the psalmist collapsed in front of what, to him, must seem to be the door of death. But it is, in fact, the door of God’s schoolhouse. It is to this end, that his way of life, condemned by the law, has brought him.²⁶⁸

If these two states are so inseparably linked, why deal with them separately? In the last lesson we considered the “teachable moment”, that moment when the eyes of the individual are opened to see their terrible condition before a Holy God. But the image of the door speaks not only of the moment of opening or transformation, but all that follows after going through that door. The door has two views: all that has gone before

²⁶⁷ As in verse 5 “O that my ways were directed to keep thy statutes!”

²⁶⁸ Here again, we can observe a parallelism between the psalmist’s experience “under the law” and that of the Apostle Paul. Both could have lamented that they wished that their ways were directed to keep thy statutes. But neither did. The law only exposed their fundamental inability to keep the commandments. Paul concluded that although “the law is holy, and the commandment holy, and just, and good, (Romans 7:12) he was “carnal, sold under sin.” (Romans 7:14b) He explained that “what I would, that do I not; but what I hate, that do I.” (Romans 7:15b) What purpose, then, did the law serve? Paul answers, in his letter to the Galatians, “Wherefore the law was our schoolmaster to bring us unto Christ, that we might be justified by faith. But after that faith is come, we are no longer under a schoolmaster, for ye are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus.”(Galatians 3:24-26)

and all that follows after. The door sees before it a crushed sinner, cleaving to the dust of the death that his ways have brought him to crying out to God for forgiveness and life. But after God has heard him and opened the door so that he has gone through it from death to life, the door also sees a victorious saint, running in the way of truth and the commandments of God. The change suggests that the first prayer has been answered and the psalmist has indeed received the “quickenings” that he sought. But even after being given life, the psalmist senses that something is still wrong, still missing: the strength to obey God and live a life pleasing to Him. It is this realization which prompts the whole second half of this octave. Again, we see this in Paul’s experience. He had prided himself (mistakenly) on his Pharisaical (and carnal) zeal.²⁶⁹ But with his awakening to the emptiness of all his vaunted hopes, he found that he had nothing to glory in before God. The specter of pride haunted him, however. He subsequently received great and singular revelations from God. But all that could pander to a new source for pride and self-confidence. In consequence, he was given a physical ailment (a thorn in the flesh, a messenger from the adversary) lest he should lapse back into prideful self-confidence. In response, Paul besought God for relief from this humbling condition that he was unable to rectify. But God refused his request. Instead He gave Paul a critical explanation for all who seek His help: “my strength is made perfect in weakness.”²⁷⁰ Paul subsequently retold this lesson to the Philippians. “I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me.”²⁷¹ But need this be so? The answer is yes and has to do with God’s eternal purposes not just for the psalmist and Paul, but for all of us. We are created to be to His eternal glory.²⁷² Therefore, it is needful that salvation as both an event and as a process rest on God’s grace ministered in response to human faith, else the reward of glory would belong to the worker and not to God. Paul uses this very argument in reference to the life of Abraham to explain the watershed doctrine: the just shall live by faith.²⁷³ So, although the dust of death as the result of sin and the inability to please God by our own merits because of sin in each of us are linked, the solution is also linked: God’s Grace and God’s Glory. Grace saves

²⁶⁹ Philippians 3:3-6 For we are the circumcision, which worship God in the spirit, and rejoice in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh, though I might also have confidence in the flesh. If any other man thinketh that he hath whereof he might trust in the flesh, I more: circumcised the eighth day, of the stock of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, an Hebrew of the Hebrews; as touching the law, a Pharisee; concerning zeal, persecuting the church; touching the righteousness which is in the law, blameless.

²⁷⁰ 2 Corinthians 12:7-9 And lest I should be exalted above measure through the abundance of the revelations, there was given to me a thorn in the flesh, the messenger of Satan to buffet me, lest I should be exalted above measure. For this thing I besought the Lord thrice, that it might depart from me. And he said unto me, My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness.

²⁷¹ Philippians 4:13

²⁷² Ephesians 1:5, 2:7 Having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself, according to the good pleasure of his will, To the praise of the glory of his grace, wherein he hath made us accepted in the beloved. ... That in the ages to come he might shew the exceeding riches of his grace in his kindness toward us through Christ Jesus.

²⁷³ Romans 4:1-5 What shall we say then that Abraham our father, as pertaining to the flesh, hath found? For if Abraham were justified by works; he hath whereof to glory; but not before God. For what saith the scripture? Abraham believed God, and it was counted unto him for righteousness. Now to him that worketh is the reward not reckoned of grace, but of debt. But to him that worketh not, but believeth on him that justifies the ungodly, his faith is counted for righteousness.

the sinner (quicken him) and then gives him the ability to live a life (the strength) that glorifies God for that grace.

Choice

²⁹ Remove from me the way of lying; and
Grant me thy law graciously
³⁰ I have chosen the way of truth:
Thy judgments have I laid before me.



In these two verses we see clearly the choice that the psalmist has made. He sees before him two ways of living, one according to lies and deception and the other according to Truth. He clearly tells us that he has chosen the latter. "I have chosen the way of truth." Commensurate with his deep awareness of his own inability to live the life that God would have him live, he cries out "Remove from me the way of lying." Notice he does not say, remove me from the way of lying but rather that the way of lying be taken away from him! Both these verses remind us that the psalmist, for all his spiritual weakness, is not abdicating responsibility for his actions before God. He has chosen the way of truth an act of his independent will. The plea "remove from me" is akin to his earlier plea "strengthen thou me" in the sense that not having a temptation present yields rather the same result as having the moral fortitude to resist the temptation when it is present. He knows all too well that when he is in a difficult situation taking the easy way out by lying is a temptation that, for all his resolve, he will not be able to resist, despite his choice of the way of truth.²⁷⁴ So he pleads that the alternate way of lying not be allowed to be present to him as an option. Had the psalmist prayed "remove me from the way of lying" it would have been tantamount to asking God to live his life for him. In that case any choice that he professed to make in favor of the way of truth would have been a hollow sham. What the psalmist is showing us here is that there is a difference between asking God to live our lives for us (irresponsibility) and asking Him to help us live our own lives responsibly, in conformity with His will, because we are too morally weakened by sin and unable to live lives pleasing to Him on our own. This is a universal condition of the human race! But what the psalmist is also telling us, by the steadfast act of his will is that, although weak, we are definitely not powerless to choose God's way of living. His plea "strengthen me" is not the same as 'empower me'. He may be weak, but he is not powerless. He knows the great truth of God that "my strength is made perfect in weakness."²⁷⁵ He has the ability both to know and to choose the right way and asserts it. Again, the psalmist's awareness of his state mirrors the

²⁷⁴ We see this choice in the case of Joseph, alone in the house with Potiphar's seducing wife, the only defense against the temptation was to flee the scene. Genesis 39:1-12

²⁷⁵ 2 Corinthians 12:6-10

experience of the Apostle Paul who tells us that “For that which I do I allow not for what I would, that do I not but what I hate, that do I.”²⁷⁶ (i.e. *I choose and affirm that what the law says I should do is right but I am unable to do what I have chosen because I am weakened through sin.*)” This universal picture of humanity’s plight has two sides. On the one side, we see the hopelessness of self-actualization, and on the other side, the possibility of doing something that can make a difference. It is this last reality that not all strength has been lost, that the image of God in the individual has not been completely and utterly effaced, that should give us great hope. There is something (if only to pray²⁷⁷) that each person can do even if they have been brought into the very dust of death by their sinful failures. And that something, though insufficient in itself to rectify the lost estate of the individual is sufficient, when done as an act of faith, to draw forth the grace of God needful to be able to not only choose the way of truth but to live successfully in that way.

The Bible abounds in examples of this, from the Israelites crossing the flooded Jordan while just by getting their feet wet, to the feeding of the five thousand by the surrender of a little boy’s bag lunch, to the raising of Lazarus from the dead when the stone that sealed his tomb was rolled away, to the widow’s mite that outweighed all the pharisaical horn blowing, to the cup of cold water quietly given in the name of a disciple. My favorite story in this regard is the story of the woman and her little alabaster box of ointment.²⁷⁸ Evidently, she had heard and understood that Jesus was going to Jerusalem to die. But even if she did not fully understand, Jesus makes clear the significance of her small but lavish sacrifice. “She is come a forehand to anoint my body to the burying.” To her detractors who valued money for charity for the poor more than devotion to their Master, Jesus offers this stinging rebuke in her defense. “Let her alone; why trouble ye her? She hath wrought a good work on me. For ye have the poor with you always, and when-so-ever ye will ye may do them good: but me ye have not always. She hath done what she could.” Volumes could be written on this response. But it is the last statement that cheers my heart and gives the dust bound dying sinner hope that all is not lost. “She has done what she could.” There are myriads of things that we should do that we cannot. There are many things that we know that we ought to do but we are weak through sin. But in every case, there is something that WE CAN

²⁷⁶ Romans 7:15- 16

²⁷⁷ Luke 18:13 And the publican, standing afar off, would not lift up so much as his eyes unto heaven, but smote upon his breast, saying, God be merciful to me a sinner.

²⁷⁸ Mark 14:3 -9 And being in Bethany in the house of Simon the leper, as he sat at meat, there came a woman having an alabaster box of ointment of spikenard very precious; and she brake the box, and poured it on his head. And there were some that had indignation within themselves, and said, why was this waste of the ointment made? For it might have been sold for more than three hundred pence, and have been given to the poor. And they murmured against her. And Jesus said, Let her alone; why trouble ye her? She hath wrought a good work on me. For ye have the poor with you always, and whensoever ye will ye may do them good: but me ye have not always. She hath done what she could: she is come a forehand to anoint my body to the burying. Verily I say unto you, Wheresoever this gospel shall be preached throughout the whole world, this also that she hath done shall be spoken of for a memorial of her.

DO! And that we must do, not as an expiation for a lifetime of guilt, but as an act of faith in the God Who hears (26a-2) and as an act of devotion to Jesus ²⁷⁹ who has given His life for our salvation. Whether we feed the hungry, give drink to the thirsty, welcome the stranger, clothe the naked, minister to the sick, or visit the prisoner, God sees all such little acts of love and faith and is moved by them. The sinner's simple prayer of faith will still bring forth the power of God's mighty grace abounding in response not only to free the enslaved soul but to bring forth praise to the eternal glory of His superabundant grace. There is still joy in heaven over one sinner who repents! ²⁸⁰

Clinging to Life

²⁵ My soul cleaveth unto the dust:
Quicken thou me according to thy word.

...

³⁰ I have chosen the way of truth:
Thy judgments have I laid before me.

³¹ I have stuck unto thy testimonies:
O LORD, put me not to shame.



In the last lesson we considered that the psalmist (who realized that he did not have the strength to achieve or maintain a harmonious relationship with God) has nevertheless done three things as an act of faith and a testimony of devotion: "I have chosen the way of truth ... Thy judgments have I laid before me ... I have stuck unto thy testimonies." We see the starkness of his choice in the comparison of the way of truth (30a) with the way of lying (29a). In laying God's judgments before him we see the willing student who prayed "teach me thy statutes" (26b) and "make me to understand the way of thy precepts." (27a) He has done what he could. He sits before his Master, scroll in hand, ready to be taught. The last action referenced is perhaps the most telling of all. "I have stuck unto thy testimonies." The little word translated "stuck" is דָּבַק *dabaq*, (pronounced daw-bak'). It is a primitive root meaning to impinge, cling or adhere. Figuratively, it means to catch by pursuit, to abide fast or cleave (fast together), follow close (hard after), be joined (together). It occurs 52 times in the Old Testament and 8 times in the Psalms. It occurs only twice in this psalm, in verses 25a and 31a: "my soul cleaveth" and "I have stuck." This last action refers to much more than a simple choice the psalmist has made. Its first use ("My soul cleaveth unto the dust") revealed both the

²⁷⁹ Matthew 25:40 And the King shall answer and say unto them, Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me.

²⁸⁰ Luke 15:7, 10 I say unto you, that likewise joy shall be in heaven over one sinner that repenteth, more than over ninety and nine just persons, which need no repentance. ... Likewise, I say unto you, there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner that repents.

psalmist's utter helplessness (he had no choice, he was dying - spiritually at least) and in his desperation as he clung not just to the dust but to his last shred of life and to the hope that God would hear his prayer: "Quicken thou me according to thy word." He had no choice in clinging to the dust, but it was to God that he wished to cling, in utter weakness. It is no different in this verse. He is clinging to God. Only this time he says in effect, 'I am clinging to your testimonies – to every word that you say about life - as if every word that you say about life is life itself to me.' His hope is entirely in God. Accordingly, He concludes his prayers of this octave with the plea that God would not disappoint that desperate hope: "O LORD, put me not to shame."

There is a profound realization in this last verse about "every word of God" that the believer absolutely needs to comprehend if they are ever to make any progress Godward in their life. When tempted by the adversary, Satan, to feed himself by turning stones into bread, Jesus answers "It is written, Man shall not live by bread alone, but by **every** word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God."²⁸¹ When Jesus is teaching in the synagogue of Capernaum, He tells the assembly: "Except ye eat the flesh of the Son of man, and drink his blood, ye have no life in you. Whoso eateth my flesh, and drinketh my blood, hath eternal life; and I will raise him up at the last day for my flesh is meat indeed, and my blood is drink indeed. He that eateth my flesh, and drinketh my blood, dwelleth in me, and I in him. As the living Father hath sent me, and I live by the Father: so he that eateth me, even he shall live by me. This is that bread which came down from heaven: not as your fathers did eat manna, and are dead: he that eateth of this bread shall live forever."

This saying occasioned much confusion and distress among Jesus' followers. They thought that Jesus was describing cannibalism, whereas He was using a parabolic idiom to explain that people would live if they put His body in their mouth (i.e. they heard His words), if they chewed His body (i.e. they understood His words) and if they swallowed His body (i.e. they believed His words). Jesus sensed their consternation, rooted in misunderstanding, by reason of their murmuring. "When Jesus knew in himself that his disciples murmured at it, he said unto them, 'Doth this offend you? What and if ye shall see the Son of man ascend up where he was before? It is the spirit that quickeneth; the flesh profiteth nothing: the words that I speak unto you, they are spirit, and they are life.'"²⁸² The clinging then of the Psalmist is to God and to His every word. He is quite correct to begin his prayer "Quicken thou me according to thy word" and to end it with "O LORD, put me not to shame." What can ever change the character of our life except the Word of God? And what is life without hope in God?

²⁸¹ Matthew 4:4

²⁸² John 6:53b – 58, 61 - 63

There are, in the centuries of Christian spiritual struggle, numerous testimonies of God's workings in the lives of sinners who were transformed to saints. In many instances, these are marked by great devotion to God and hope arising in even the most dire circumstances and abysmal spiritual failures. There are heights of ecstasy and heroic abandonments to Divine providence, the reading of which can tear the believer between the desire to emulate such noble examples, and despair of ever reaching such spiritual heights. In such temptations, we do well to remember the psalmist's humble testimony, "I have stuck (*I have cleaved*) unto thy testimonies." For all the greatness of the lives of past saints, God still provides each of us a daily opportunity to do as the psalmist did; to withdraw in adoring silence and pray with him: "Quicken thou me according to thy word. ...Teach me thy statutes. ...Make me to understand the way of thy precepts. ...Strengthen thou me according unto thy word. ...Remove from me the way of lying: and grant me thy law graciously. ...O LORD, put me not to shame."

Transformation

²⁵ My soul cleaveth unto the dust:
Quicken thou me according to thy word.

...

³² I will run the way of thy commandments,
When thou shalt enlarge my heart



The last verse of this octave forms a remarkable counterpoint to the first. In the first we see a sorrowful penitent, without strength, brought to the very dust of death by his way (26a) - the way of lying (29a). In the last we see a strong man rejoicing to run the race of life in the way of truth (30a).²⁸³ And yet they are the same man! The difference, by the psalmist's own admission, is that God has seen fit to "enlarge my heart." We have here yet another instance of that in which the Bible abounds: accounts of the transformation of human lives from broken and dying affairs lived in separation from Him to vibrant lives that impact the lives of others by the outpourings of God's grace that has changed the individual's life. What happens to the psalmist happens every day. It is possible for any person who comes to the end of their own way and is willing to pray to God as the psalmist has in this octave.²⁸⁴

²⁸³ Psalm 19:2-5 Day unto day uttereth speech, and night unto night showeth knowledge. There is no speech nor language, where their voice is not heard. Their line is gone out through all the earth, and their words to the end of the world. In them hath he set a tabernacle for the sun. Which is as a bridegroom coming out of his chamber, and rejoiceth as a strong man to run a race.

²⁸⁴ Although we have addressed this set of prayers. It is perhaps wise to take one last note of their beauty and power: "Quicken thou me according to thy word. ... Teach me thy statutes ... Make me to understand the way of thy precepts ... Strengthen thou me according unto thy word ... Remove from me the way of lying: and grant me thy law graciously ... Put me not to shame."

But transformation does not happen in a vacuum. Its very nature argues the presence of a state before and a remarkably different state after. It involves the very flow of time as we experience it: past, present, future. The reality of the transformation behind these two verses gives us an opportunity to see the possibility of an alternate ending for any life from the beginning of the most unpromising start. In a world of broken lives, such a view of others is rare among believers but possible. The usual way that we tend to see the individual is as they are at the present moment, and that may not only be unpromising, but downright discouraging. When Peter came to Jesus, he was a self-assured, fickle man, quick to state his own view of things to others (even God) and slow to see his own faults. His name, at that time, was Simon. Anyone who really knew him could easily have despaired of ever seeing a more humble, a less self-assured, and a more self-aware person. But it was not so with Jesus. **“Thou art Simon the son of Jona: thou shalt be called Cephas, which is by interpretation, a stone.”** He sees Simon as he really is and an alternate ending for the life of this fickle and headstrong young man at the same time! **Thou art** a soul cleaving unto the dust. **Thou shalt be** a runner in the way of God’s commandments. And just like the psalmist, Peter will experience this transformation in two steps: passing from death to life and from weakness to strength. The first comes when he finally understands with Whom he has been dealing. “Thou art the Christ.” Whereupon Jesus tells him “Thou art Peter.”²⁸⁵ The second comes when Peter finally realizes who he really is without Christ – a weak and cowardly man.²⁸⁶ There is no trace of pride left in him when Jesus finally asks him if he truly loves Him more than the fish that he has just caught. In successive interrogations, He re-commissions him as an under-shepherd of the flock of God.²⁸⁷

In many ways, this long view of the end from the beginning is the unique view of God. God’s view stretches from eternity past through the moment of transformation to eternity future as the Apostle Paul tells the Ephesian Church.

“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ: according as he hath chosen us in him

²⁸⁵ Matthew 16:15-17 “He (*i.e. Jesus*) saith unto them, But whom say ye that I am? And Simon Peter answered and said, Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God. And Jesus answered and said unto him, Blessed art thou, Simon Barjona: for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven.

²⁸⁶ Matthew 26:74-75 Then began he to curse and to swear, saying, I know not the man, and immediately the cock crew. And Peter remembered the word of Jesus, which said unto him, ‘Before the cock crow, thou shalt deny me thrice.’ And he went out, and wept bitterly.

²⁸⁷ John 21:15-19 “So when they had dined, Jesus saith to Simon Peter, ‘Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me more than these?’ He saith unto him, ‘Yea, Lord; thou knowest that I love thee.’ He saith unto him, ‘Feed my lambs.’ He saith to him again the second time, ‘Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me?’ He saith unto him, ‘Yea, Lord; thou knowest that I love thee.’ He saith unto him, ‘Feed my sheep.’ He saith unto him the third time, ‘Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me?’ Peter was grieved because he said unto him the third time, Lovest thou me? And he said unto him, ‘Lord, thou knowest all things; thou knowest that I love thee.’ Jesus saith unto him, ‘Feed my sheep. Verily, verily, I say unto thee, When thou wast young, thou girdedst thyself, and walkedst whither thou wouldest: but when thou shalt be old, thou shalt stretch forth thy hands, and another shall gird thee, and carry thee whither thou wouldest not.’ This spake he, signifying by what death he should glorify God. And when he had spoken this, he saith unto him, Follow me.

before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love: Having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself, according to the good pleasure of his will, To the praise of the glory of his grace, wherein he hath made us accepted in the beloved. In whom we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of his grace.”²⁸⁸

But, to some extent, this octave challenges us to stop seeing people’s lives as if they were a stone whose total trajectory is determined from the moment they are released from the ‘hand of fate’. It challenges us to be optimistic about the possibility that God can transform a life from death to life, from brokenness to wholeness, from weakness to strength. The glory of such a transformation, however, lies not in the life thus transformed but in Him who transformed it. The death is ours, but the life is His. The brokenness is ours but the wholeness is His. The weakness is ours but the strength is His. His strength is made perfect in our weakness.²⁸⁹ So this octave encourages a great optimism, not just about the possibility of transformed lives but rather that the Glory of God continues to increase in the lives of myriad people whose hearts He enlarges.

²⁸⁸ Ephesians 1:3-7

²⁸⁹ 2 Corinthians 12:9 And he (*i.e. God*) said unto me, My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness. Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me.

⌈ (HE)

☞ Prayers for the Mind ☞

- 33 Teach me, O LORD, the way of thy statutes;
And I shall keep it unto the end.
- 34 Give me understanding, and I shall keep thy law;
Yea, I shall observe it with my whole heart.

☞ Prayers for the Will ☞

- 35 Make me to go in the path of thy commandments;
For therein do I delight
- 36 Incline my heart unto thy testimonies,
And not to covetousness
- 37 Turn away mine eyes from beholding vanity;
And quicken thou me in thy way.

☞ Prayers for God's Providential Care ☞

- 38 Stablish thy word unto thy servant,
Who is devoted to thy fear
- 39 Turn away my reproach which I fear:
For thy judgments are good.
- 40 Behold, I have longed after thy precepts:
Quicken me in thy righteousness.



⌈ - He means to behold, to reveal, to show. It speaks of presence and present necessity. When God would reveal His presence, He could say to the surprised soul, "Here am I." When Jacob awoke out of that sleep in which God revealed His presence to the frightened patriarch, he said, "Surely the LORD is in this place; and I knew it not." He called that place "the house of God (Beth-El)" and "the gate of heaven."²⁹⁰ We might have said "the LORD is here!" How do we respond when God reveals His presence? Like the desperate pilgrim, the fleeing and frightened Jacob, we may pray desperately. God's *presence* draws forth the confession of *present* need. God is *here* and *here* is what needs to be done.

This octave abounds in eight prayers grouped in three areas: prayers for the mind (cognition: 33-34), prayers for the will (volition: 35-37), and prayers for God's providential care (38-40). Each prayer says in effect: 'Here is what I need you to do for me.'

²⁹⁰ Genesis 28:16 -17 And Jacob awaked out of his sleep, and he said, 'Surely the LORD is in this place; and I knew it not.' And he was afraid, and said, 'How dreadful is this place! This is none other but the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven.'

Prayers for the Mind: The Cognitive favors requested of God are twofold: “Teach me” (33) and “Give me understanding” (34). Both are necessary because of the way that God has designed our minds. We all must acquire a measure of knowledge by rote memory. Early teaching of children stresses this kind of learning in mathematical tables, word recognition, pronunciation, response to rules, etc. But later education aims at developing the ability to think critically (often starting with the rote material) so that new situations may be analyzed effectively and new problems may be solved correctly. That is the case here. The psalmist wants to know the statutes (rote learning) and understand them (critical thinking), but the “keeping” of them (as in 33b and 34b) depends on both.

Prayers for the Will: While knowledge of the law is necessary to obedience, it is not sufficient. The psalmist goes on to ask that God consider his will. Here again the moral aspects of life are lived, first under external constraints: “make me to go” (35) and then by means of self motivation based on internal propensity: “incline my heart.” (36) Here again we see that the moral teaching or ethical training of children first involves constraint but cannot possibly end there. As children grow up, they must be prepared for confronting moral problems and making sound ethical choices not only on constraint based rote knowledge of right and wrong, but on their the ability to critically analyze ethical questions successfully and on their heart inclination to humility (love) and obedience: to do justly and to love mercy.²⁹¹ Such a heart inclination is truly a work of God.²⁹² We should also note the nature of the choice that is mentioned: “Incline my heart unto thy testimonies and not to covetousness.”²⁹³ This request leads again to a second plea for moral constraint “Turn away mine eyes from beholding vanity.” (37) What the psalmist is saying is that, although his heart’s delight is correctly focused God’s foundational commandments (35b) and his mind has been educated both to know God’s statutes (33) and to understand how to think about them (34), he knows that his heart can be led astray by what his eyes behold – vanity. He can be deceived by what he sees as good in opposition to what he knows is good. There is still the danger that he will miss the mark by desiring that which is not of God and not according to God’s will.

Prayers for God’s Providential Care: The psalmist knows that even with instruction and heart transformation, he still needs God’s providential care over circumstances external to himself. He needs confirmation of God’s word (38) as his foundation (that on

²⁹¹ Deuteronomy 10:12 And now, Israel, what doth the LORD thy God require of thee, but to fear the LORD thy God, to walk in all his ways, and to love him, and to serve the LORD thy God with all thy heart and with all thy soul,

Micah 6:8 He hath showed thee, O man, what is good; and what doth the LORD require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?

²⁹² Ezekiel 36:26 A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you: and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you an heart of flesh.

²⁹³ Exodus 20:17 Thou shalt not covet thy neighbor’s house, thou shalt not covet thy neighbor’s wife, nor his manservant, nor his maidservant, nor his ox, nor his ass, nor any thing that is thy neighbor’s.

which his life is established). He needs God to deal with his past (“my reproach” either as God sees it or as men see it²⁹⁴). And he needs God to “Quicken” him (i.e. give him newness of life) so that he may proceed in thy way (37b) and in thy righteousness (40b). The psalmist’s desire for newness of life, points to the Messiah, Jesus, Who alone will be able to satisfy the psalmist’s final requests in this octave. ²⁹⁵

God’s Part and Our Part: These prayers of faith involve not just asking God to do something. They also involve the psalmist’s response to Him. Before God does for the individual what he cannot do for himself, He usually gives that individual a work that they can do in faith. It is so with us as well. If we will do our part faithfully; He will do His part in graciously. We cannot part the Jordan, but we can get our feet wet.²⁹⁶ We cannot feed the five thousand, but we can surrender our bag lunch and make the people sit down in order.²⁹⁷ We cannot raise Lazarus from the dead, but we can roll away the stone.²⁹⁸ He graciously works His great salvation in us, but it is we who must diligently work out that salvation in our daily lives.²⁹⁹

The basic thing behind all these prayers is a willingness to obey (I shall keep – 33b, 34a ... I shall observe it with my whole heart – 34b). We are reminded of our Lord Jesus in the garden of Gethsemane, praying, “Nevertheless not my will, but thine, be done”³⁰⁰ He knew: here is what must be done; and He did it!

²⁹⁴ The words “my reproach” seem ambiguous. Is this God’s reproach of the psalmist for his past failures, or the evil reproach of men for his godly life style, or the correct judgments of men against earlier sins worthy of censure and that now bring a reproach not only on the psalmist but on God whom he longs to follow? If it is God’s reproach, then this prayer is another way of asking forgiveness for the psalmist’s sin. If this is the reproach of men for his godly life style then there is a danger that the fear of man’s evil reproach could deflect him from following God wholeheartedly. If this is the correct judgments of men against earlier sins worthy of censure and that now bring a reproach not only on the psalmist but on God whom he longs to follow, then this prayer would give him a basis for refuting their judgment. Since the tenor of all these eight prayers begins with repentance (stemming from its appearance in Daleth - 119:25 “My soul cleaveth to the dust”) and proceeds to obedience, the prayer is entirely appropriate. The psalmist’s prayer for the removal of his reproach, whether true or false, good or ill, is tantamount to a confession that he wants to fearlessly follow God. He knows that we can either fear God or men, but not both. In either case, it is clear that he wants to choose the fear of the LORD and prays that either the fear of men or his actual guilt will be removed root and branch.

²⁹⁵ John 10:23-28 “And Jesus walked in the temple in Solomon’s porch. Then came the Jews round about him, and said unto him, ‘How long dost thou make us to doubt? If thou be the Christ, tell us plainly.’ Jesus answered them, ‘I told you, and ye believed not: the works that I do in my Father’s name, they bear witness of me. But ye believe not, because ye are not of my sheep, as I said unto you. My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me: And I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand.’”

²⁹⁶ Joshua 3:13 - 16 ... “And as they that bare the ark were come unto Jordan, and the feet of the priests that bare the ark were dipped in the brim of the water, (for Jordan overflowed all his banks all the time of harvest,) ... That the waters which came down from above stood and rose up upon an heap very far from the city Adam, ...

²⁹⁷ Luke 9:12 - 17 “... he said unto them, Give ye them to eat. And they said, We have no more but five loaves and two fishes ... And he said to his disciples, “Make them sit down by fifties in a company. And they did so, and made them all sit down. Then he took the five loaves and the two fishes, and looking up to heaven, he blessed them, and brake, and gave to the disciples to set before the multitude. And they did eat, and were all filled: and there was taken up of fragments that remained to them twelve baskets.”

²⁹⁸ John 11:32, 39 “When Mary was come where Jesus was, and saw him, she fell down at his feet, saying unto him, Lord, if thou hadst been here, my brother had not died ... Jesus said, Take ye away the stone.”

²⁹⁹ Philippians 2:12 - 13 “Wherefore, my beloved, as ye have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, **work out your own salvation** with fear and trembling, **for it is God which worketh in you** both to will and to do of his good pleasure.

³⁰⁰ Luke 22:41 - 44 “And he was withdrawn from them about a stone’s cast, and kneeled down, and prayed, saying, ‘Father, if thou be willing, remove this cup from me: nevertheless, not my will, but thine, be done.’ And there appeared an angel unto him from

There is also a heart attitude behind all these prayers: delight in (35b), devotion coupled with fear (38b), and longing for (40a) It is interesting that while the core principle of the entire law is love,³⁰¹ the beginning of wisdom is fear.³⁰² The fear of the LORD is entirely compatible with loving Him.

There are also ten things pertaining to God mentioned in these lines: thy statutes (33), thy law (34), thy commandments (35), thy testimonies (36), thy way (37), thy word (38a), thy fear (38b), thy judgments (39), thy precepts (40a), and thy righteousness (40b). Without the essence of these instrumentalities, we cannot volitionally relate to God in terms of obedience nor affectively relate to God in terms of an awe filled love. We become Beth-el by the abiding presence of the eternal Λογος, Jesus, in our heart.³⁰³

An Enlarged Prayer Life

32 I will run the way of thy commandments,
When thou shalt enlarge my heart

¶

33a Teach me, O LORD, the way of thy statutes;

...

34a Give me understanding,

...

35a Make me to go in the path of thy commandments;

...

36a Incline my heart unto thy testimonies,

...

37a Turn away mine eyes from beholding vanity;

...

38a Stablish thy word unto thy servant,

heaven, strengthening him. And being in an agony he prayed more earnestly: and his sweat was as it were great drops of blood falling down to the ground."

³⁰¹ "Matthew 22:37-40 "Jesus said unto him, 'Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself. On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets.'"

³⁰² Psalm 111:10 The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom: a good understanding have all they that do his commandments: his praise endureth for ever.

³⁰³ This is not to say that we are justified by the keeping of the law. We are justified with God by the finished work of our Lord Jesus on the cross. But, as God does not change, so the standard of His holiness does not change. Paul reminds us that "the law is holy, and the commandment holy, and just, and good." (Romans 7: 12) The measure of (but not the basis of) the work of sanctification by the Holy Spirit of God in us, then, is still the law which describes our blessed Lord Jesus and should increasingly describe us as we grow in grace and the knowledge of Him. As is the vine so are the branches. "Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine; no more can ye, except ye abide in me. I am the vine, ye are the branches: He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit: for without me ye can do nothing. If a man abide not in me, he is cast forth as a branch, and is withered; and men gather them, and cast them into the fire, and they are burned. If ye abide in me, and my words abide in you, ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you. Herein is my Father glorified, that ye bear much fruit; so shall ye be my disciples." (John 15:4 – 8)

...

^{39a} Turn away my reproach which I fear:



The octave \neg dalet ends with what (on closer examination) is an enigmatic reference to a divine operation of life changing effect: I will run ... when *you enlarge my heart*. In the last lesson, we considered the occurrence of transformed lives in Bible accounts of God's dealings with men.³⁰⁴ It is a given that God can and, very often does, transform the life of the individual. One may even understand this as a central motif of all biblical references to salvation, since salvation would be reduced to a sham of externality were it not for the interior dimension of the changed heart. (*See God's promise vs. Jesus' condemnation of lip service*)

*"A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you: and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you an heart of flesh. And I will put my spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes, and ye shall keep my judgments, and do them."*³⁰⁵

*"He answered and said unto them, 'Well hath Isaiah prophesied of you hypocrites, as it is written, This people honoreth me with their lips, but their heart is far from me.'"*³⁰⁶

As an ancient book, the Bible presents no systematic exposition of the doctrine of man's soul (psychology). It does, however, present us with several concepts about human behavior that are critical to understand. While human behavior may be influenced by circumstances or forces outside the individual, the source of human behavior is rooted in the internal life of the individual. We jump out of the way of an oncoming car, for example, because something inside us does not want to suffer an immediate and painful death. That internal source of behavior is called the heart. In scripture, the heart is presented as the source of our cognitive,³⁰⁷ volitional,³⁰⁸ and affective life.³⁰⁹ The heart

³⁰⁴ The writer to the Hebrews is awed by the proliferation of such lives as he says: "And what shall I more say? for the time would fail me to tell of Gideon, and of Barak, and of Samson, and of Jephthae; of David also, and Samuel, and of the prophets: who through faith subdued kingdoms, wrought righteousness, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions, quenched the violence of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, out of weakness were made strong, waxed valiant in fight, turned to flight the armies of the aliens." (Hebrews 11:32-34)

³⁰⁵ Ezekiel 36:25 - 29 "Then will I sprinkle clean water upon you, and ye shall be clean: from all your filthiness, and from all your idols, will I cleanse you. A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you: and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you an heart of flesh. And I will put my spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes, and ye shall keep my judgments, and do them. And ye shall dwell in the land that I gave to your fathers; and ye shall be my people, and I will be your God. I will also save you from all your uncleanness: and I will call for the corn, and will increase it, and lay no famine upon you.

³⁰⁶ Mark 7:6 Jesus quoting Isaiah 29:13 "Wherefore the Lord said, 'Forasmuch as this people draw near me with their mouth, and with their lips do honor me, but have removed their heart far from me, and their fear toward me is taught by the precept of men.'"

³⁰⁷ Proverbs 23:7 For as he thinketh in his heart, so is he: Eat and drink, saith he to thee; but his heart is not with thee.

³⁰⁸ Proverbs 3:1 My son, forget not my law; but let thine heart keep my commandments: (*i.e. keep in the sense of to remember (cognition) and to do (volition)*)

is presented as central to the matters of living. “Keep thy heart with all diligence; for out of it are the issues of life.”³¹⁰ It is also key to man’s relationship with God. “The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked: who can know it? I the LORD search the heart, I try the reins, even to give every man according to his ways, and according to the fruit of his doings.”³¹¹

The word for the divine operation on the inner man here is “enlarge.” To enlarge typically means to increase the capacity to receive or to hold. The foolish farmer of the gospel account decides to enlarge his barns to hold a bumper crop.³¹² As we move into the next octave, we see that heart transformation with its ensuing change of life behavior does not obviate the need for prayer; it enlarges it. It focuses the prayers following in $\bar{\eta}$ (He) on cognition (teach me ... give me understanding), volition (make me to go ... incline my heart ... turn away mine eyes), and affection (stablish (*i.e. give me a settled peace about*) thy word ... turn away my reproach which I fear). Great saints of every age have deeply understood this truth. As they grew closer to God, two realizations dawned upon them: their own unworthiness and wretchedness before Holy God and the utter necessity for constant, heart-wrenching prayer. “For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh,) dwelleth no good thing: for to will is present with me; but how to perform that which is good I find not”³¹³ says Paul of his vain, self-righteous strivings. At the end of his struggle he utters this heart-filled cry, “O wretched man that I am! Who shall deliver me from the body of this death?”³¹⁴

As we approach this octave, we should bear in mind that these prayers are not pious utterances of plebian prayer. These are the earnest outpourings of an enlarged heart wrenched by the desperate awareness that all now depends on God and not self. The psalmist, who would be blessed, needs to have his heart enlarged for prayer in order to receive within it “all things that pertain unto life and godliness.”³¹⁵

³⁰⁹ While there is broad categorization of “the emotions” in scripture yet there are numerous instances of the hearts association with specific emotions as in Proverbs 15:13 “A merry heart maketh a cheerful countenance: but by sorrow of the heart the spirit is broken.” Or Proverbs 13:12 “Hope deferred maketh the heart sick: but when the desire cometh, it is a tree of life.”

³¹⁰ Proverbs 4:23

³¹¹ Jeremiah 17:9-10

³¹² Luke 12:16-21 And he spake a parable unto them, saying, “The ground of a certain rich man brought forth plentifully: And he thought within himself, saying, ‘What shall I do, because I have no room where to bestow my fruits?’ And he said, ‘This will I do: I will pull down my barns, and build greater; and there will I bestow all my fruits and my goods. And I will say to my soul, Soul, thou hast much goods laid up for many years; take thine ease, eat, drink, and be merry.’ But God said unto him, ‘Thou fool, this night thy soul shall be required of thee: then whose shall those things be, which thou hast provided?’ So is he that layeth up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God.”

³¹³ Romans 7:18

³¹⁴ Romans 7:24

³¹⁵ 2 Peter 1:2 - 4 Grace and peace be multiplied unto you through the knowledge of God, and of Jesus our Lord, According as his divine power hath given unto us all things that pertain unto life and godliness, through the knowledge of him that hath called us to glory and virtue: Whereby are given unto us exceeding great and precious promises: that by these ye might be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust.

Revelation in Relationship

³³ Teach me, O LORD, the way of thy statutes;
And I shall keep it unto the end.

³⁴ Give me understanding,
And I shall keep thy law;
Yea, I shall observe it with my whole heart.



These two verses speak to the psalmist's need for education. It is God, whom the psalmist desires for a teacher. It is His statutes and law (governance) that he wishes for a subject. And it is the ability to keep and observe them that he wishes to graduate with. No finer education is possible from an eternal point of view. Here again we encounter the notion of transformation. But this is transformation by education, a concept quite well understood by many in our world. Before, we heard the psalmist say "O that my ways were directed to keep thy statutes!" Now, we hear him say "I shall keep thy statutes unto the end. ... I shall observe thy law with my whole heart" ... a heart that has been enlarged by the hand of God! So, education is, in the Divine economy, one means of heart enlargement or transformation. Nor is there anything that should make us believe that this excellent 'university' is only for the wealthy or elite of society. It is open to all men. Open provided there is a willingness ³¹⁶ to 'matriculate'. But do God's students ever 'graduate'? Or are they just ever learning? The Bible speaks of those who are "laden with sins, led away with divers lusts, ever learning, and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth."³¹⁷ But it is not so in God's school of obedience. He assures us, that his disciples (students), "... shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free"³¹⁸ But this last, while differentiating the nature of God's schooling from all others, raises the question what does He mean by the word know? It was, after all, the Gnostics who erroneously stressed that secret knowledge and not faith was the means of obtaining salvation.

³¹⁶ Willingness presumes an invitation which we find in numbers of places:

Isaiah 1:16 - 19 "Wash you, make you clean; put away the evil of your doings from before mine eyes; cease to do evil; Learn to do well; seek judgment, relieve the oppressed, judge the fatherless, plead for the widow. Come now, and let us reason together, saith the LORD: though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool. If ye be willing and obedient, ye shall eat the good of the land."

Isaiah 55:1-3 "Ho, every one that thirsts, come ye to the waters, and he that hath no money; come ye, buy, and eat; yea, come, buy wine and milk without money and without price. Wherefore do ye spend money for that which is not bread? And your labor for that which satisfies not? Hearken diligently unto me, and eat ye that which is good, and let your soul delight itself in fatness. Incline your ear, and come unto me: hear, and your soul shall live; and I will make an everlasting covenant with you, even the sure mercies of David."

Matthew 11:28 - 30 "Come unto me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls, for my yoke is easy, and my burden is light."

³¹⁷ 2 Timothy 3:6b - 7

³¹⁸ John 8:31 - 32 Then said Jesus to those Jews which believed on him, If ye continue in my word, then are ye my disciples indeed. And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.

Just as the focus has been on heart enlargement as the basis of transformation of the life, so learning in God's 'school' is focused on heart learning. The first prayer, "Teach me, O LORD, the way of thy statutes", doubtless refers to cognitive processes. The second prayer, "Give me understanding", may also refer to a cognitive state: understanding as opposed to knowledge. But understanding clearly builds on knowledge. It is reasonable to assume that we cannot understand what we do not know. Is it possible for me (apart from the miracle of xeno-glossolalia) to speak in French if I do not know the language? Can I understand a book in Russian if I do not know both the Cyrillic alphabet and the Russian language? So, these two prayers, while similar, comprehend what is a process of learning - from rote to reasoned, from hearing and remembering to understanding. But this begs yet another question. Is this all there is? Are there no other further steps to go from purely cognitive processes to heart processes? As pointed out in the last lesson, the heart (in scripture) is viewed as the source of our cognitive, volitional, and affective life. Transformation is expressed in action from the heart more than in regurgitation of lessons stored in the mind. The psalmist is telling God that: 'I shall keep and observe ... with my whole heart unto the end.' How can this be? What has happened?

"The center of life is neither in thought nor in feeling, nor in the will, not even in consciousness, so far as it thinks, feels, or wishes. For moral truth may have been penetrated and possessed in all these ways, and escape us still. Deeper even than consciousness there is our being itself, our very substance, our nature. Only those truths which have entered into this last region, which have become ourselves, become spontaneous and involuntary, instinctive and unconscious, are really our life - that is to say something more than our property. So long as we are able to distinguish any space whatever between the truth and us, we remain outside it. The thought, the feeling, the desire, the consciousness of life, are not yet quite life. But peace and repose can nowhere be found except in life, and in eternal life, and the eternal life, that is the divine-life, is God. To become divine³¹⁹ is then the aim of life: then only can truth be said to be ours beyond the possibility of loss, because it is no longer outside us, nor even in us, but we are it, and it is we; we ourselves are a truth, a will, a work of God. Liberty has become nature; the creature is one with its creator - one through love. It is what it ought to be; its education is finished, its final happiness begins. The sun of time declines and the light of eternal blessedness arises.

Our fleshly hearts may call this mysticism. It is the mysticism of Jesus: 'I am one with my Father; ye shall be one with me. We will be one with you'"

~ Henri-Fredrick Amiel (*Journal Intime* - Oct 27, 1853)

³¹⁹ While technically correct, the term "become divine" can easily be misunderstood to be joined essentially to God, which is not possible. The only truly divine, theanthropic, person is Jesus Christ. Only in Him do we find that the (eternal) Word has become flesh because only He is the eternal Word (λογος). Nevertheless, there is an everyday sense in which the deep penetration of the word of Truth, in transforming the human heart, does make us so like Jesus in His humanity, that what He would do in any given situation, we spontaneously and unconsciously do as well because His word has become our life.

The oneness spoken of here is not essential (that is impossible) but existential and played out experientially. It revelatory! Jesus desires the oneness of believers that in their oneness He may be seen. And when He is seen then God is seen to the extent that is possible for us as created beings, made in the image of God, to be a revelation of God. And why is this important? "That the world may know that thou hast sent me, and hast loved them, as thou hast loved me."³²⁰

Constraint vs. Motivation

³⁵ Make me to go in the path of thy commandments;
For therein do I delight

³⁶ Incline my heart unto thy testimonies,
And not to covetousness



These two prayers are both focused on the will. The first speaks of the psalmist's delight in the commandments of God. The second speaks of his fear of covetousness, which would be a violation of the tenth commandment. His delight is certainly a result of the foregoing prayers both to be taught the statutes and to understand the law. "I delight" says Paul "in the law of God after the inward man."³²¹ But with that delight there is a sense of grief and an expression of his fear, because the psalmist, who has been taught "thy statutes" and made to understand "thy law", also understands that he is unable to keep either because of his crippled will. "The good that I would I do not: but the evil which I would not, that I do."³²² The law has become his schoolmaster³²³ not only to teach him what is right but to reveal to him the terrible effects of sin on the level of the will. The knowledge of the law may delight the psalmist's heart, but the schoolmaster cannot free the psalmist's will. Only God can do that. And God has dealt with this problem, but not in the psalmist's day. The psalmist had only an efficacious foreshadowing (in various animal sacrifices) of the reality spoken of by Paul.

"For what the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh, God sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh:

³²⁰ John 17:20 - 23 "Neither pray I for these alone, but for them also which shall believe on me through their word; That they all may be one; as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us: that the world may believe that thou hast sent me. And the glory which thou gavest me I have given them; that they may be one, even as we are one: I in them, and thou in me, that they may be made perfect in one; and that the world may know that thou hast sent me, and hast loved them, as thou hast loved me.

³²¹ Romans 7:22

³²² Romans 7:19

³²³ Romans 7:7 What shall we say then? Is the law sin? God forbid. Nay, I had not known sin, but by the law: for I had not known lust, except the law had said, Thou shalt not covet.

Galatians 3:24-25 Wherefore the law was our schoolmaster to bring us unto Christ, that we might be justified by faith. But after that faith is come, we are no longer under a schoolmaster.

that the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit."³²⁴

So, the prayers of verses 33 and 34, while necessary, are not sufficient. Prayer must be made to God, as well, for the deliverance of the will enslaved by sin. "Make me to go" is the plea of a willing child. But is being a child in will, really what God ultimately desires for us? Ought He to be constraining the psalmist's feet through external means year after year? The guardrail may constrain the swerving vehicle from plunging over the precipice causing the driver's death, but is not the reformation of the drunken driver much to be preferred than the building of endless guard rails? The circumstantial constraint requested in verse 35 is still external to the life. God's control needs to be interior to the life. That is not to say that this first prayer is unworthy. It is quite necessary. We are all children before we are adults. But we do not stay children. "When I was a child, I spake as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child: but when I became a man, I put away childish things."³²⁵ God's promise in the scriptures encourages such a hope of maturation.

"A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you: and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you an heart of flesh. And I will put my spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes, and ye shall keep my judgments, and do them."³²⁶

Again, the Apostle Paul concludes his autobiographical account in Romans with the observation that it is not the external constraint of the law on the will that is the ultimate solution but that leading of the Spirit of God within (as prophesied by Ezekiel) that causes the individual to "walk in my statutes, keep my judgments, and do them."

"There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit. For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus hath made me free from the law of sin and death."³²⁷

Just as in verses 33 and 34 understanding follows from being taught, reasoned thought from rote memory, so in verses 35 and 36 interior motivation follows from exterior constraint, the inclination of the heart follows from the constraint of the feet. It is this second prayer that harks back to the transformation described by the words: "when thou shalt enlarge my heart." There is no question that both experiences will be the work of God in response to the psalmist's prayer, but the order and focus of these prayers reveal an important understanding of God's *modus operandi*. He works from the outside in. "Behold, I stand at the door, and knock: if any man hears my

³²⁴ Romans 8:3-4

³²⁵ 1 Corinthians 13:11

³²⁶ Ezekiel 36:26 - 27

³²⁷ Romans 8:1 - 2

voice, and opens the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me."³²⁸ Christ stands outside the door of the heart, asking admission. But the promise of blessedness, around which this psalm rotates, is that of a harmonious relationship with God where He has taken up residence within the heart and, communing with the individual constantly, has made of that heart a Bethel, a house of God.

Redirection of Desire

³⁷ Turn away mine eyes from beholding vanity;
And quicken thou me in thy way.



The connection between the first and the second parts of this verse lies in the image of one whose eyes look straight ahead on the path before them and their feet follow like servants in the direction of their gaze. In a more prosaic sense, we tend to look where we are going. The psalmist is asking God to turn away his eyes from beholding that which is false, idolatrous, unreal and passing away (for such is the meaning of the word “vanity”). This is tantamount to asking God to cause him to walk in His way – the way of truth, the way of true worship, and the way which is permanent and real.

The eye plays a very important role in the scriptural idiom. “We walk by faith not by sight,” says the apostle.³²⁹ He refers to what we, somewhat poetically, call the eye of faith as opposed to the eye of the body. Add to these the eye of the mind that can focus on things material and immaterial both in regard to the world and to God, and we have a trio of “eyes” in our spiritual vocabulary. The Christian, looking at these verses with this in mind, might well ask of which eye is the psalmist speaking? The reference here, while preserving a physicality regarding the eye of the body, does not refer primarily to the physical eye, but to that for which it stands – human desire. We might say that he is speaking here of the ‘eyes of the heart.’ The sense of the word in Hebrew also includes the concept of a fountain (as the ‘eye’ of a garden) – a fountain from which springs evidence of human desire. We tend to look at or for things that we desire. In that sense, the psalmist is praying that God would intervene and redirect the desires of his heart away from everything that is vanity – everything that is not God. This image is not foreign to the psalms. “Delight thyself also in the LORD; and he shall give thee *the desires of thine heart.*”³³⁰

But desire plays an influential role in many human affective processes. Consider hope and fear. We fear an occurrence that we do not really desire; while we hope for an occurrence that we do desire. Consider frustration and anger. We become frustrated

³²⁸ Revelation 3:20

³²⁹ 2 Corinthians 5:7

³³⁰ Psalm 37:4

when a desired end that we had not only hoped for, but had expected does not occur. We may even grow angry over the constant frustration of our expectations, of our avowed desires, for whatever a situation or a relationship may have offered but did not deliver. Two men go into a casino. Each has the same amount of money. In the course of time and chance, both lose all their money. One emerges frustrated and angry, while the other emerges cheerful and happy. What is different? The first expected to win and make a great deal of money, while the other just wanted to be entertained by the thrill of gambling for as long as chance would allow. The one desired wealth, the other entertainment. The differences of their desires make all the difference in their affective states at the end of the day. Desire is a fundamental part of our humanity. It is linked to our ability to love. What we love, we desire to possess, and therefore we pursue. Our success or failure in pursuing and attaining what is desired influences our emotions. It is this spectrum of human desire coupled with our ability or inability to obtain the object(s) of our desires that establishes to some extent the emotional topology of our spiritual lives: our fears, our hopes, our dreams, and (ultimately) the direction that our “feet” take us. It all harks back to Eden where Eve “saw that the tree was (a) good for food, and that it was (b) pleasant to the eyes, and a tree (c) to be desired to make one wise, she took of the fruit thereof, and did eat, and gave also unto her husband with her; and he did eat.”³³¹ Against this background, the apostle John gives us a three-fold warning about misdirected human desire for that which seems good, pleasant, and therefore to be desired in the world:

“Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world, (a) the lust of the flesh, and (b) the lust of the eyes, and (c) the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world. And the world passeth away, and the lust thereof: but he that doeth the will of God abideth forever.”³³²

The apostle Paul describes this as our former estate before coming to faith in Jesus Christ.

“And you hath he quickened, who were dead in trespasses and sins; Wherein in time past ye walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience: Among whom also we all had our conversation in times past in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind; and were by nature the children of wrath, even as others.”³³³

It is this mindset, this array of misplaced desire centered on the vanity of this world that the psalmist is asking to be delivered from in order to be “quickened” in God’s

³³¹ Genesis 3:6

³³² 1 John 2:15-17

³³³ Ephesians 2:1 - 3

way. This humble prayer, then, asks for nothing less than that God would redirect the entire spectrum of the psalmist's emotional life toward Himself and away from the world.

Confirmation of Relationship

³⁷ Remove mine eyes from seeing vanity,
In Thy way quicken Thou me.

³⁸ Establish³³⁴ to Thy servant Thy saying,
That *is* concerning Thy fear.

- (Young's Literal Translation)



Taken in isolation, verse 38 is a difficult verse because the meaning of 38b is ambiguous in relation to 38a. Is the psalmist saying that it is the word that concerns the fear of the LORD or is he saying that he needs to be confirmed in that word to achieve his devotion to the fear of God? It helps to understand that verses 37 and 38 are pendants that look to one another. Verse 37a is a negative request, "remove mine eyes from seeing..." Verse 38 is the matching positive request, "establish to Thy servant..." What the psalmist is asking (in effect) is that God would 'turn my eyes from everything that is false, idolatrous, unreal and passing away and steadfastly fix my eyes on your saying' (on your word - אַמְרָה 'imrah). The psalmist knows that if God leads him in the Divine pathway, the direction that he truly desires to go ("Thy way"- 37b.), then His word (אַמְרָה 'imrah) will lead invariably to the fear of the LORD.

As humans, we need to look where we are going. Not only must we be turned away from every wrong way but we need to have assurance that we are traveling in the right way. The danger is that doubt, arising in our heart, will cause our gaze to be distracted from the right way and prevent steadfast progress in the fear of the LORD. While the psalmist is concerned about a mindset in which misplaced desire centered on the vanity of this world can lead him away from God's way (37), he is also concerned about the danger of doubt in the presence of faith which can cause him to stumble in that way (38). Faith exclaims: "God has said...!" Doubt questions: "Yea, hath God said?" It was this questioning that lay at the very core of the serpent's deception in the Garden of Eden when he drew Eve into specious reasoning through doubt so that she turned her eyes from God to the fruit of the forbidden tree.³³⁵ Doubt can turn the spiritual eyes

³³⁴ קִוַּמּוּ quwm, (pronounced koom) a primitive root; meaning to be clearer, to confirm, to continue or decree, to set (up), to 'establish' or establish, to strengthen.

³³⁵ Genesis 3:1 -6 Now the serpent was more subtil than any beast of the field which the LORD God had made. And he said unto the woman, **Yea, hath God said.** Ye shall not eat of every tree of the garden? And the woman said unto the serpent, We may eat of the fruit of the trees of the garden: But of the fruit of the tree which is in the midst of the garden, God hath said, Ye shall not eat of it, neither shall ye touch it, lest ye die. And the serpent said unto the woman, Ye shall not surely die: For God doth know that in the day ye eat thereof, then your eyes shall be opened, and ye shall be as gods, knowing good and evil. And when the woman saw that

away from God just long enough to cause the pilgrim to miss the way; which is why the psalmist prays that God would “Establish to Thy servant Thy saying.” Not only must his spiritual gaze be turned from vanity, it must be fixed (established) on the word by which God leads him. It is this fixed gaze of strong faith in opposition of the solicitations of doubt that lies behind the saying of the wise man: “Let thine eyes look right on, and let thine eyelids look straight before thee. Ponder the path of thy feet, and let all thy ways be established. Turn not to the right hand nor to the left: remove thy foot from evil.”³³⁶

But, we might ask, why does the psalmist choose the Fear of the LORD as the single criteria by which that God-ward pathway may be perceived? Might he not have chosen to describe it as the pathway of service or worship or obedience or love? The answer is simple enough: all these are true descriptors but they don’t go deep enough. To serve God acceptably, there must be reverence and godly fear. “... let us have grace, whereby we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear: for our God is a consuming fire.”³³⁷ So too with worship: “O worship the LORD in the beauty of holiness: fear before him, all the earth.”³³⁸ We have shown before that obedience without love is not acceptable to God, and that both obedience and love must be rooted in the true fear of the LORD, for He says, “Wherefore the Lord said, Forasmuch as this people draw near me with their mouth, and with their lips do honor me, but have removed their heart far from me, and their fear toward me is taught by the precept of men” and again “This people honoreth me with their lips, but their heart is far from me.”³³⁹

The psalmist has recognized that which is essential to all our spiritual lives: our service, obedience and worship must all be rooted in our love of God; and that love must be rooted in the fear of the LORD, not as taught by men: “do this and that or else...” but as taught by God, Himself; by His every word – the word that leads us into a reverential, joyous, exultant, wonderful, loving fear that characterizes life with God. It is not as if the psalmist sees God hidden behind some far-off hill calling to him in a faint voice. Rather he knows that God is present with him; loves him; communes with him along the pilgrim pathway. The word is near him. It is the very essence of his relationship with the LORD!³⁴⁰ The writer to the Hebrews assures us that “...it is a good thing that

the tree was good for food, and that it was pleasant to the eyes, and a tree to be desired to make one wise, she took of the fruit thereof, and did eat, and gave also unto her husband with her; and he did eat.

³³⁶ Proverbs 4:23 -27 “Keep thy heart with all diligence; for out of it are the issues of life. Put away from thee a froward mouth, and perverse lips put far from thee. Let thine eyes look right on, and let thine eyelids look straight before thee. Ponder the path of thy feet, and let all thy ways be established. Turn not to the right hand nor to the left: remove thy foot from evil.”

³³⁷ Hebrews 12:28-29

³³⁸ Psalm 96:9

³³⁹ Isaiah 29:13 quoted by Jesus in Mark 7:6

³⁴⁰ Deuteronomy 30:11-16 “For this commandment which I command thee this day, it is not hidden from thee, neither is it far off. It is not in heaven, that thou shouldest say, ‘Who shall go up for us to heaven, and bring it unto us, that we may hear it, and do it?’ Neither is it beyond the sea, that thou shouldest say, ‘Who shall go over the sea for us, and bring it unto us, that we may hear it, and do it?’ But the word is very nigh unto thee, in thy mouth, and in thy heart, that thou mayest do it. See, I have set before thee this day

the heart be established with grace; not with meats, which have not profited them that have been occupied therein.”³⁴¹ That is to say that is it good to have our heart assured by the inward presence of God’s power (grace) rather than an assurance based on our outward, mechanical performance (meats). If the psalmist knew that God’s אַמְרָה (‘imrah) – word leads to this all-important relationship with God, how much more should we who have God’s WORD – Jesus for our traveling companion be confirmed by Him in our most holy faith!

From Fear to Fear – Forgetting Failure

³⁷ Remove mine eyes from seeing vanity,
In Thy way quicken Thou me.

³⁸ Establish³⁴² to Thy servant Thy saying,
That *is* concerning Thy fear.

³⁹ Remove my reproach that I have feared,
For Thy judgments are good.

- (Young’s Literal Translation)



Verse 39 builds on verse 38. In 38, “Thy saying” leads to greater reverential fear of the LORD as the basis for heartfelt obedience and worship. Such a movement in the life is possible only because God has first reoriented the psalmist’s eyes (his desires) away from the vacuity of the world around him (37) and confirmed the reality of the Kingdom of Heaven (38). The psalmist’s response to God’s operation requested in 37 is certainly repentance, a true change of heart and mind. The psalmist’s response to God’s operation in 38 is faith in the confirming saying of God. What more is there? In 39, he asks that God would deal with the memory of his past failures.

“O that my ways were directed to keep thy statutes! Then shall I not be ashamed ³⁴³... Remove from me reproach and contempt; for I have kept thy testimonies.³⁴⁴ ... Remove from me the way of lying: and grant me thy law graciously.³⁴⁵ ... Turn away my reproach which I fear: for thy judgments are good.”³⁴⁶

life and good, and death and evil; in that I command thee this day to love the LORD thy God, to walk in his ways, and to keep his commandments and his statutes and his judgments, that thou mayest live and multiply: and the LORD thy God shall bless thee in the land whither thou goest to possess it.”

³⁴¹ Hebrews 13:9b

³⁴² קוּמַי quwm, (pronounced koom) a primitive root; meaning to be clearer, to confirm, to continue or decree, to set (up), to ‘establish’ or establish, to strengthen.

³⁴³ Psalm 119:5, 6a

³⁴⁴ Psalm 119:22

³⁴⁵ Psalm 119:29

³⁴⁶ Psalm 119:39

The contrast lays between (38b & 39a) the confirming saying of God that leads to the fear of LORD and the psalmist's fear of past failures remembered in the condemnation of either man or God. Certainly, if the feared reproach is from his fellow Israelites, such a just reproach would necessarily injure the relationship between himself and those around him. Whatever witness the psalmist's life of future obedience might have had for the goodness of God would then be ruined in consequence of past failures. God forgives but people don't forget. Certainly, a compromised testimony of God's goodness because of public opprobrium is much to be feared by all believers. "Abstain from all appearance of evil," is Paul's admonition to the Thessalonians and to us as well.³⁴⁷

But if the reproach is of God, surely the psalmist's repentance and faith would have been met by God's mercy and grace as is the case for all His children. Nevertheless, the psalmist may still *feel* his failure despite having been forgiven. And that feeling, rooted in the remembrance of past failure, is not so much a fear of condemnation but rather that the fear of reproach brings with it the fear of recidivism that becomes a basis for behavior motivated by doubt. Fear begets fear. And fear, of whatever sort, solicits action in unbelief, which is sin. The famous dictum of Roosevelt, "We have nothing to fear but fear itself," while not always true, may be applicable here. The Psalmist does not want to ever again damage of his relationship with the LORD. And to obviate that possibility, he asks that God, "remove my reproach that I have feared."

In either case the problem lies not with guilt but with the memory of failure, either society's or the psalmist's. It is this issue that God addresses when He tells us of the new covenant.

"For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, saith the Lord; I will put my laws into their mind, and write them in their hearts: and I will be to them a God, and they shall be to me a people: And they shall not teach every man his neighbor, and every man his brother, saying, Know the Lord: for all shall know me, from the least to the greatest. For I will be merciful to their unrighteousness, and their sins and their iniquities will I remember no more."³⁴⁸

It is a sad truth that we tend to fear future failures because we remember past failures. And fear can create the very thing that is feared. Because the thief fears capture, he runs away when he sees the policeman. The policeman, seeing him run, pursues the thief where he would otherwise not, had the thief not run from fear. While the fear of condemnation is not justified after divine mercy is bestowed and God has promised to "forget", the fear that **our remembrance** of our past failures can lead to future sin is real. We tend to say, "I am a failure because I have failed so many times before." What is

³⁴⁷ 1 Thessalonians 5:22

³⁴⁸ Hebrews 8:10 – 12 repeated in Hebrews 10:16-17

wrong then? The fear of the LORD is lacking. The psalmist has already pleaded that God would confirm His saying that leads to reverential and trusting dependence on God. Now he pleads that God would remove the reproach which he fears could take his eyes off God and leave him alone without God's help. Reproach is to the psalmist what the waves were to Peter when he stepped out of the boat and, after walking toward Jesus, took his eyes off the Lord and surveyed the boiling sea with fear. He sank!³⁴⁹

What then is the connection between 39a and 39b? The memory of past failures is linked to the operation of our conscience. The emotion of guilt that the conscience controls is an ambivalence of fear, anger and sorrow; sorrow for hurting others that we love; anger at our failure, our discovery, and the rules that condemn as well as fear of detection, of punishment, and of future failure. "Do not grieve about a sin that is past and gone..." says Abba Anthony to Abba Pambo. God is greater than our conscience, and His judgments are good.

"My little children let us not love in word, neither in tongue; but in deed and in truth. And hereby we know that we are of the truth, and shall assure our hearts before him. For if our heart condemn us, God is greater than our heart, and knoweth all things. Beloved, if our heart condemn us not, then have we confidence toward God. And whatsoever we ask, we receive of him, because we keep his commandments, and do those things that are pleasing in his sight. And this is his commandment that we should believe on the name of his Son Jesus Christ, and love one another, as he gave us commandment. "³⁵⁰

Salvation

⁴⁰ Behold, I have longed after thy precepts:
Quicken me in thy righteousness.



Throughout this psalm, we have noted the psalmist's (and our) very real inability to do anything to avoid further sinning or to save ourselves. The divine judgment against the sinner is not as many human notions of judgment affirm: a balance between the good things we have done and the bad, where if the good that we do 'outweighs' the bad, we will be spared. Any sin is sufficient to indicate the lost estate of the sinner. And all are therefore condemned sinners, because "... all have sinned, and come short of the glory

³⁴⁹ Matthew 14:25-33 "And in the fourth watch of the night Jesus went unto them, walking on the sea. And when the disciples saw him walking on the sea, they were troubled, saying, It is a spirit; and they cried out for fear. But straightway Jesus spake unto them, saying, Be of good cheer; it is I; be not afraid. And Peter answered him and said, Lord, if it be thou, bid me come unto thee on the water. And he said, Come. And when Peter was come down out of the ship, he walked on the water, to go to Jesus. But when he saw the wind boisterous, he was afraid; and beginning to sink, he cried, saying, Lord, save me. And immediately Jesus stretched forth his hand, and caught him, and said unto him, O thou of little faith, wherefore didst thou doubt? And when they were come into the ship, the wind ceased. Then they that were in the ship came and worshipped him, saying, Of a truth thou art the Son of God."

³⁵⁰ 1 John 3:18-23

of God.”³⁵¹ Being under sentence of death (i.e. separation from God), the psalmist pleads again and again: “Quicken me.”³⁵² Here the basis for the psalmist’s plea for deliverance is “thy righteousness” or, as some ³⁵³ translate it “thy faithfulness.” Although the term צדקה (tsed-aw-kaw’) also occurs in verse 142, it is only used only here as a basis for pardon. The psalmist is also saying what he has said before about his longing ³⁵⁴ but not as a basis for having his life spared. What then are we seeing in this unique verse? The psalmist is not saying that I am really a nice guy because I long for your precepts. Nor is he saying that you should spare me because, even though I have failed, I really want to do what you say I should. He is not pleading that I have the right motives even if I get it wrong sometimes. He is not building his case for divine pardon based on anything within him. He knows that is folly. He is building his case on the basis of relationship. His longing for the precepts of God is evidence that he cites of his being the LORD’s servant, not of being righteous. And with servants, the Master has the reciprocal responsibility of fidelity in relationship as an expression of their righteousness. What the psalmist is saying, in effect, is remarkably bold: God, even though I am a sinner, you owe it to me to spare my life, because I am your servant!

At first glance this argument might seem even more presumptuous than those based on his character. But it is the only plea that leaves room for the glory of God to be revealed in the grace of God. If the commuting of a death sentence were based on the psalmist’s (or our) extenuating circumstances, then the decision would be all about justice and the glory would go to the defendant who, after all, did have some good in him worth sparing. But such is not the case. We are all utterly condemned, so there is no other basis for commuting our death sentence than the mercy of God, His mercy to sinning servants whom He chooses to spare because of His fidelity to the covenant that He has established. The real question that this raises is how could such a relationship between a thrice Holy God ever have been established with sinful creatures in the first place? The obvious answer, which is clearer to the Christian today, was somewhat less clear to the psalmist, but not totally opaque. The answer for him and for us lies in the word for salvation: תשועה (tesh-oo-aw’) - Jesus. The octave ה meaning here is what must be

³⁵¹ Romans 3:23

³⁵² Psalm 119:25 My soul cleaveth unto the dust: quicken thou me according to thy word.
 Psalm 119:37 Turn away mine eyes from beholding vanity; and quicken thou me in thy way.
 Psalm 119:40 Behold, I have longed after thy precepts: quicken me in thy righteousness.
 Psalm 119:88 Quicken me after thy loving-kindness: so shall I keep the testimony of thy mouth.
 Psalm 119:107 I am afflicted very much: quicken me, O LORD, according unto thy word.
 Psalm 119:149 Hear my voice according unto thy loving-kindness: O LORD, quicken me according to thy judgment.
 Psalm 119:154 Plead my cause, and deliver me: quicken me according to thy word.
 Psalm 119:156 Great are thy tender mercies, O LORD: quicken me according to thy judgments.
 Psalm 119:159 Consider how I love thy precepts: quicken me, O LORD, according to thy loving-kindness.

³⁵³ John Goldingay

³⁵⁴ Psalm 119:20 My soul breaketh for the longing that it hath unto thy judgments at all times.
 Psalm 119:174 I have longed for thy salvation, O LORD; and thy law is my delight.

done ends with this plea based on relationship. It looks ahead to ׀ which means the Nail or Peg, the One on Whom all depends. Verse 41 begins "Let thy mercies come also unto me, O LORD, even thy salvation (תְּשׁוּעָה ~ tesh-oo-aw') according to thy word." The specific grace of God dealing with the sinner is mercy. And that mercy comes to the sinner through relationship with God through His salvation, His Jeshua ~ His Jesus. God calls people into a relationship with himself by means of the person of Jesus Christ, His Son. It is of this that Paul writes to the Corinthians.

*"I thank my God always on your behalf, for the grace of God which is given you by Jesus Christ; That in every thing ye are enriched by him, in all utterance, and in all knowledge; Even as the testimony of Christ was confirmed in you: So that ye come behind in no gift; waiting for the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ: Who shall also confirm you unto the end, that ye may be blameless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ. God is faithful, by whom ye were called unto the fellowship of his Son Jesus Christ our Lord."*³⁵⁵

In the end, whether for the psalmist or for us, there is no other basis for pleading for our eternity with God apart our relationship with Him which He calls us into - the fellowship of His Son, Jesus Christ. Nor is there any other hope of salvation (i.e. the forgiveness of our just condemnation) than in that basis which God, Himself, has provided in the person and work of His Son on the cross, where He was judged in our place. The psalmist's plea is effectually described by the Apostle John.

*"But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin. If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness."*³⁵⁶

May we earnestly and truly thank God for such a gracious way of Salvation wherein we may plead along with the Psalmist, "Quicken me in thy righteousness."

³⁵⁵ 1 Corinthians 1:4 - 9

³⁵⁶ 1 John 1:7 - 9

ו (VAU)

☞ The Psalmist's Prayer ☞

- 41 Let thy mercies come also unto me, O LORD,
Even thy salvation, according to thy word
- 42 So shall I have wherewith to answer him that reproaches me
For I trust in thy word.
- 43 And take not the word of truth utterly out of my mouth;
For I have hoped in thy judgments.
- 44 So shall I keep thy law continually
For ever and ever

☞ Prayer's Answers ☞

- 45 And I will walk at liberty:
For I seek thy precepts.
- 46 I will speak of thy testimonies also before kings,
And will not be ashamed.
- 47 And I will delight myself in thy commandments,
Which I have loved
- 48 My hands also will I lift up unto thy commandments,
Which I have loved; and I will meditate in thy statutes.

☞

ו - **Vau** means a nail, a peg, or a hook. It can also refer to an anchor which is a kind of hook. All of these join things together so that the attributes of that which is hung possesses the attributes of that to which the hook is attached. So, for example, our clothes are possessed of no structural ability to stand on their own. But when they are hung on a hook or peg set in a wall of great vertical stability they remain upright despite their inability to stand on their own. They manifest vertical stability without actually possessing the attribute. It is communicated to them by means of the peg or the hook. In just the same way a ship which at sea possesses no lateral stability (it can be blown in any lateral direction with great danger of crashing into submerged rocks). But it gains the lateral stability of the seabed by means of its anchor which hooks itself into the sea bed. So, let the winds blow as they may, they cannot blow the ship into the shoals because the lateral stability of the sea bed is communicated to the ship via the anchor cord. It is this picture that the writer to the Hebrews evokes when he says "... which hope we have as an anchor of the soul, both sure and steadfast, and which enters into that within the veil."³⁵⁷

³⁵⁷ Hebrews 6:16 - 20 "For men verily swear by the greater: and an oath for confirmation is to them an end of all strife. Wherein God, willing more abundantly to shew unto the heirs of promise the immutability of his counsel, confirmed it by an oath: that by two immutable things, (i.e. a promise sealed by an oath) in which it was impossible for God to lie, we might have a strong consolation, who have fled for refuge to lay hold upon the hope set before us: Which hope we have as an anchor of the soul, both sure and

In a deeper sense, ו (VAU) speaks of the communication of attributes by relationship. Think of wealth, for example. A person not possessing wealth is said to be poor. But a poor person may obtain wealth in one of two valid ways: by earning it or through a relationship.³⁵⁸ It is this second way of which ו - vau, the peg, speaks. The poor person obtains wealth by marriage or birth that leads to inheritance or by befriending a wealthy person who gives them a gift as an expression of love. The poor person obtains that of which they are not inherently possessed by means of the relationship which unites them to another who does possess wealth.

The structure of this octave is in two parts. This first section presents a single two-part prayer with positive and negative aspects, unlike the previous octave which contained eight. "Let thy mercies come also unto me, even thy salvation, according to thy word, O LORD (41) ... and take not the word of truth utterly out of my mouth (43a)." The first pertains to obtaining the psalmist's salvation while the second pertains to not losing his testimony. They are both related because, apart from salvation from God, one has no testimony. But how is it that the psalmist hopes to obtain a salvation that he cannot earn? Just as with wealth, it is relationship that brings inheritance or common property (as in marriage). The attention of the reader may initially focus on salvation and testimony as ends in themselves, but the introductory letter points us to the means by which that salvation is obtained – the nail. It is Zechariah who writes: "Out of him (Judah) came forth the corner, out of him the nail,..."³⁵⁹ The picture clearly points to Jesus as the one

steadfast, and which enters into that within the veil; whither the forerunner is for us entered, even Jesus, made an high priest for ever after the order of Melchisedec." This is a very parabolic way of relating our faith and hope in Jesus Christ the mediator of God the Father's sworn promise to bless all humanity in Abraham and his seed (Genesis 22:17,18 and Hebrews 6:13). The "veil" is the bar that separates the dangerous sea from the safe harbor. The safe harbor is the throne room of God where sin cannot enter and its destructive force cannot wreak havoc. The ship is our humanity which is in constant mortal danger of being destroyed by being blown into the shoals of God's judgment by the winds of our various and sundry lusts. But, praise be to God, His intent is to bless not destroy us, despite our inability to avoid sinning and coming into His judgment. He does this by providing us a sea anchor in the form of His oath-sealed promise to which the anchor cord of our faith and hope may be attached. He also provides us a "fore-runner" a small, shallow draft ship capable of bearing that sea anchor of our lives together with the chord of our faith and hope over the bar (the veil) when the tide is out. The tide being out simply tells us that it is not time for us to enter within the veil into that harbor of great safety (the royal throne room) "... whither the forerunner is for us entered, even Jesus, made an high priest for ever after the order of Melchisedec." But, in bearing the full weight of the oath-sealed promise of God to Abraham and having deposited that sea anchor before the royal throne, there is communicated to us the full benefit of God's immutability and of Jesus' righteousness (of which we inherently possess neither) as a safeguard against all mortal dangers of our earthly experiences at sea. There is another picture that may have been in the Apostle's mind: that of a rope which was tied to the body of the high priest when he went once a year into the holy of holies. There was a constant tinkling of the bells and pomegranates that rimmed his robe that testified that he was still alive and interceding for the people. Had God struck him dead for some offense, the sound would have stopped and the priests would have recovered the body by pulling on the rope. The question, then was, "Is he alive?" Against this background the writer assures us elsewhere in the letter that Jesus "... is able also to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by him, seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for them." Hebrews 7:25

³⁵⁸ I do not believe that gambling is a valid or acceptable means of obtaining wealth in God's economy anymore than theft. In a sense, people who gamble, misuse the assets placed in their hands for others and so, in effect, steal from those who were meant to benefit by that trust. Such fiduciary infidelity is manifest in numerous tragic instances involving gambling.

³⁵⁹ Zechariah 10:3-4 "Mine anger was kindled against the shepherds, and I punished the goats: for the LORD of hosts hath visited his flock the house of Judah, and hath made them as his goodly horse in the battle. Out of him came forth the corner, out of him the nail, out of him the battle bow, out of him every oppressor (i.e. every powerful ruler) together."

who being utterly joined to God in His essence communicates the righteousness, truth, love, and power of God in our undeserved but freely bestowed salvation. He, it is upon Whom all our hopes and faith hang in much the same way that all the law and prophets hang from the nail of love of God and neighbor.³⁶⁰

This twofold plea has two immediate consequences introduced in each case by the little connective “so shall I” (42a, 44a). God’s loving kindness in rescuing the psalmist will give him a ready answer for his critics: “So shall I have wherewith to answer him that reproaches me.” And, God’s true judgments will keep him walking in the way continually.³⁶¹

What follows in the second section sound may sound like promises made to induce God’s favorable reply to the two-part plea that opened this octave. In fact, they are not. The meaning of the introductory letter: ׀ - VAU, the nail, suggests that all the psalmist’s hopes for his spiritual life hang on God’s willingness to show him the kindness that rescues “according to thy word.” In short, everything depends upon God. As noted earlier, a nail ultimately functions as a transmitter of the attributes of the one possessing them to the one that does not possess them. It does this by relating (in a sense attaching) the one to the other. As with all pegs or nails on which hung things depend, there is facility in the hung object that allows this dependence to take place: a rope, a strap, a hook. That dependence for the psalmist (and for us) is prayer. So, what follows (in this second part) are not promises meant to induce a favorable hearing but consequences that depend on God’s faithfulness to His word, especially spoken promises (41b). They are the consequences in the psalmist’s life of answered prayer, not unlike the two already mentioned (testimony and obedience). While hardly exhaustive, the psalmist mentions four additional consequences (freedom, joy, prayer/praise, and meditation) and one extended consequence (testimony) that ultimately depend on God’s grace.

Freedom: “I will walk at liberty.” The question here arises: what do we use our liberty for when God grants it to us?³⁶² The psalmist advises us to use our freedom to understand the mind of God.

The word translated “nail” here is not ׀ - vau but יתד yathed (pronounced yaw-thade’) which comes from an unused root meaning to pin through or fast; a peg:--nail, paddle, pin, stake. It is used 19 times in the Old Testament and translated seven times. The concept is still viable, however, in that a nail joins two materials with often dissimilar natures together.

³⁶⁰ Matthew 22:37-40 “Jesus said unto him, ‘Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself. On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets.’”

³⁶¹ The verse “So shall I keep thy law continually for ever and ever” may sound like legalism, but it is not. It is the simple recognition underlying this octave that everything depends on God. If the psalmist is to take the next step, it is God’s true judgment that must guide him. If God will continue such step by step guidance and “take not the word of truth utterly out of my mouth,” then the psalmist shall be able “keep thy law continually, for ever and ever.”

³⁶² The apostle reminds us to use the gift wisely. “For, brethren, ye have been called unto liberty; only use not liberty for an occasion to the flesh, but by love serve one another.” - Galatians 5:13

Testimony: “I will speak of thy testimonies before kings, and not be ashamed.” A leitmotif of this psalm is the psalmist’s unfortunate relationship with others in authority. “Princes also did sit and speak against me” (23) and later “Princes have persecuted me without a cause (161). Here he first says that if God will answer his prayer, then he will have “wherewith to answer him that reproaches me.” Evidently his detractors included kings as well. What might their reproach be other than reiterating the psalmist’s spiritual failings? What might his unashamed answer be to their reproach, but that God has pardoned him and enabled him to keep God’s law continually? We are reminded that our witness before men is not one of personal sanctity based on our strenuous efforts so much as God’s forgiveness of our many sins and failures and His continuing love for us as dear children. We are saved by grace. Again, our witness is what this octave emphasizes that all our life depends (or hangs) on the “nail” who relates us to God – Jesus Christ – by grace through faith.³⁶³

Joy: I will delight myself in thy commandments. Joy springs from love. Here, we must ask our selves the question Jesus asked Peter: “Lovest thou me more than these?”³⁶⁴ It is not that we are not blessed with joy in our lives, we are. But do we love the One who grants us joy? For the psalmist it is “Thy commandments which I have loved.” “If ye love me, keep my commandments.”³⁶⁵

Prayer / Praise: “(I will) lift up my hands unto thy commandments.” Whom we love, we desire. Whom we desire, we both pray to and praise. It is not that the psalmist prays to God’s commandments, but he uses them in prayer. The commandments of God are linked to His promises. So, to pray the commandment of God is to plead His promises, as the psalmist did at the start: “Let thy mercies come also unto me, O LORD, even thy salvation, according to thy word.”³⁶⁶

Meditation: “... I will meditate in thy statutes.” While commandments are foundational to God’s care of our spiritual lives, there is a work of faith for each one of us in the use our reason and our understanding of God’s ‘thinking’ to examine the every day occurrences of our daily lives. For some, meditation has come to be associated with a

³⁶³ Ephesians 2:4 -10 But God, who is rich in mercy, for his great love wherewith he loved us, even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ, (by grace ye are saved;) and hath raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus: that in the ages to come he might shew the exceeding riches of his grace in his kindness toward us through Christ Jesus. For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: not of works, lest any man should boast. For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them.

³⁶⁴ John 21:15 “... these” refers to the fish Peter had just caught. The contrast ‘me or fish’ nascent in this exchange harks back to Jesus’ original call to Peter: If you follow me, I will make you fishers of men, as opposed going on the way you have as fishers of fish. In calling Peter, thus, Jesus is not condemning worthy earthly occupations. He is reminding us that there is more to life than just earning a living. We were created to serve God and enjoy His fellowship forever. We need to listen for His voice calling us to follow Him and be ready to move with Him as He directs. For the believer in Jesus, His call is His command. There really is no other choice for love. If we love Him we will keep His commands

³⁶⁵ John 14:15

³⁶⁶ See also Acts 4:24-31 for an illustration of “lifting up the hands unto thy commandments” in the life of the early Church.

withdrawn monastic life style. But the press of daily life demands that we be constantly reflecting on just how God would have us live amid life's ever-changing vicissitudes. All this, and even our very life, hangs on our dependency on Jesus in prayer.

The point of view of the psalmist is, of course, personal. The verses look with great insight and authenticity at his spiritual life. But letter ם- vau hints a question that we could ask: how does the nail feel? When we realize that the nail speaks of our Lord Jesus, we understand easily. Just as the nail bears the burden of all that is hung on it, so our Lord Jesus bore the full burden of our guilt, shame, and woe. Not only that, but He bore the full weight of God's righteous judgment against us. Even today, he invites us to cast all our burdens upon Him for He cares for us.³⁶⁷ His constant intercessory ministry preserves His nail-like character as He bears daily all our cares and needs before the throne of grace.

Finally, in a deeply ironic and mysterious way, the very instruments which God allowed to hold the sagging and suffering form of His Beloved Son to the cross of Calvary were nails. The very objects that speak so deeply of His office were the objects that secured His body to the cross. But our hearts know that, beyond a shadow of a doubt, what kept Him on the cross were not the nails, but his love for each one of us.

The Power of the Word

⁴⁰ Lo, I have longed for Thy precepts,
In Thy righteousness quicken Thou me,

ם

⁴¹ And meet me doth Thy kindness, O Jehovah,
Thy salvation according to Thy saying.

⁴² And I answer him who is reproaching me a word,
For I have trusted in Thy word.

- Young's Literal



Despite the fact that verse 41 marks the start of a new octave, there is a sense of connectedness between verses 40 and 41-42. In the last lesson we saw that the basis for the psalmist's plea that the LORD spare his life was relational: "quicken me in Thy righteousness." Righteousness describes the role of the LORD in relationship with the psalmist (and us). Holiness describes the character of Him with Whom the psalmist (and we) have to deal. But God's kindness (mercy – KJV) is the peg (ם - VAU) on which all the psalmist's (and our) hopes hang. For the psalmist, life is not merely the independent continuation of his conscious existence as a living organism. Life is

³⁶⁷ 1 Peter 5:7 Casting all your care upon him; for he careth for you.

relational. Life means to have an active relationship with the LORD. This view of life explains (in part) the biblical assertion that the “wages of sin is death”³⁶⁸ and the somewhat paradoxical assertion that the person that lives in pleasure is dead while they live.³⁶⁹ Salvation is not merely the sparing of the physical life but preservation of the relationship with God of which this entire psalm speaks. And that salvation (תְּשׁוּעָה - tesh-oo-aw') is totally dependent on God’s word (אִמְרָה - im-raw'); God’s commandment which conveys in a powerful way His kindness or mercy (חֶסֶד - kheh'-sed). So, verses 40b and 41a are two parts of a single prayer. “...quicken me in thy righteousness (and) let thy mercies come also unto me, O LORD, even thy salvation, according to thy word.” The net effect of this prayer (as God answers it) is a continuation of the psalmist’s *experience* of his relationship with God. But that experience is marked by something else – hostility of those around him who are estranged from God and the people of God. Their response to the discomfort of having a citizen of heaven in their midst is mockery and reproach. The psalmist has to deal with such persons. The other great consequence of God’s answer is that the psalmist may now answer them word for word. “I answer him who is reproaching me a word (דַּבָּר - daw-baw')” The notion in verse 42 is that of a dialogue ongoing between the psalmist and his detractors. For every word they utter in disdain, reproach, mockery; he answers them word for word from his experience of God’s love and mercy. That which the psalmist desires to subsist in his relationships with unbelievers, the hard of heart against God, is contained in the very words of truth and kindness uttered by God. Of him it might be said as was said of Jesus. “Who did no sin, neither was guile found in his mouth. Who, when he was reviled, reviled not again; when he suffered, he threatened not; but committed himself to him that judges righteously.”³⁷⁰ Finally the psalmist tells us why he desires this. “... I have trusted in Thy word (דַּבָּר - daw-baw').” The word pattern with which the psalmist answers his detractors mirrors the accumulated word pattern of the LORD with him, an accumulated testimony that he trusts implicitly and which has become his testimony. This is why the psalmist continues to pray that the word (דַּבָּר - daw-baw') not be taken utterly from his mouth (43).

What is the total picture these three verses create for our instruction? Everything depends on the all-important utterance of God, His command of mercy. God’s pardoning command is part of a much larger dialogue, just as every saying in any relationship is part of a larger (and ongoing) dialogue. But that life-giving dialogue is not dead ended with the recipient whose life with God has been spared. It ‘flows’ through the psalmist to those around him who are strangers to the grace of God. If the

³⁶⁸ Romans 6:23 For the wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.

³⁶⁹ 1 Timothy 5:6 But she that liveth in pleasure is dead while she liveth.

³⁷⁰ 1 Peter 2:22-23

psalmist experiences God's mercy, then he must tell others of that mercy. It becomes his testimony. And that testimony is not just a matter of repeating the words that he has heard, but of mirroring the attitude and the behavior of God that he has seen in his relationship with Him. Has he been forgiven? Then he must forgive those who reproach him and their words of mockery must be answered by his words of mercy. This prayer and the ensuing experience of the psalmist are also meant for us. This whole picture is exemplary. It is contained in the passage (already cited).

*"Servants, be subject to your masters with all fear; not only to the good and gentle, but also to the froward. For this is thankworthy: if a man, for conscience toward God, endure grief suffering wrongfully. For what glory is it, if, when ye be buffeted for your faults, ye shall take it patiently? But if, when ye do well, and suffer for it, ye take it patiently, this is acceptable with God. For even hereunto were ye called: because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that ye should follow his steps: Who did no sin, neither was guile found in his mouth: Who, when he was reviled, reviled not again; when he suffered, he threatened not; but committed himself to him that judgeth righteously: Who his own self bare our sins in his own body on the tree, that we, being dead to sins, should live unto righteousness: by whose stripes ye were healed."*³⁷¹

The Source of Testimony

ἦ (vau)

- ⁴¹ And meet me doth Thy kindness, O Jehovah,
Thy salvation according to Thy saying.
⁴² And I answer him who is reproaching me a word,
For I have trusted in Thy word.
⁴³ And Thou takest not utterly away
from my mouth the word of truth,
Because for Thy judgment I have hoped.

- Young's Literal



Verse 43 continues and completes the prayer begun in 40 b which, taken together, reads:

Preserve my life in your righteousness. May your unfailing love come to me, O LORD, your salvation according to your promise; then I will answer the one who taunts me, for I trust in your word. Do not snatch the word of truth from my mouth, for I have put my hope in your laws.

- NIV

³⁷¹ 1 Peter 2:18 - 24

This entire prayer embodies the notion of a flow of words from God to the psalmist and through the psalmist to his hostile naysayers. It begins with God's formal decree (אמרה - im-raw') bringing the psalmist's spiritual revivification and flows through him as words (דבר - daw-baw') spoken in an effectual answer to those who reproach or taunt him. The words that he speaks to his naysayers are his testimony. As such they not only transmit the word of pardon uttered by God for his deliverance but the whole dialogue of which that revivifying command is a part. It is a testimony not to a single command, but the entire word of God (דבר - daw-baw') in which he places his confidence. This is akin to the psalmist saying to his opponents, 'this is what God has said and I believe it!' Having been given both the life of relationship which he has prayed for and an answer to those who reject his witness, his fear is articulated in verse 43. "Do not snatch the word (דבר - daw-baw') of truth from my mouth." Here, we may observe at least three things:

- *The psalmist's testimony does not consist of his words but God's.*

It is the "word of truth" that is found in the psalmist's mouth. The word of truth points to God Who is Truth. One is reminded in this regard of Jesus' testimony of the source of the power of His miraculous words:

"Believest thou not that I am in the Father, and the Father in me? The words that I speak unto you I speak not of myself: but the Father that dwelleth in me, he doeth the works."³⁷²

"I have given them thy word; and the world hath hated them, because they are not of the world, even as I am not of the world. I pray not that thou shouldst take them out of the world, but that thou shouldst keep them from the evil. They are not of the world, even as I am not of the world. Sanctify them through thy truth: thy word is truth."³⁷³

Furthermore, both the character of the word spoken to the psalmist and the words spoken by the psalmist are all of a piece. Has he heard the word of pardon spoken in mercy; then he must speak words of compassion to those who hate him, and pray for those who despitefully use him as the butt of their poisoned jibes.³⁷⁴

- *The content of his witness is not based solely on his intellectual apprehension of God's word but of his experience of it's reality in his life.*

The psalmist's prayer is uttered against an experiential background of God's communication, a communication in which he has placed his hope (42b). The psalmist has not only heard the word of God, but integrated that word as the foundation of his

³⁷² John 14:10

³⁷³ John 17:14-17

³⁷⁴ Matthew 5:44-46 "But I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you; That ye may be the children of your Father which is in heaven: for he maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust. For if ye love them which love you, what reward have ye? Do not even the publicans the same?"

life. This is suggested by the word translated truth: אמת (eh'-meth). It is a contraction of the primitive root אמן (aw-man') which means, properly, to build up or support; to foster as a parent or nurse and figuratively to render (or be) firm or faithful, to trust or believe. So, the word אמת (eh'-meth) translated truth in 43a, connotes the stability that would be associated with a foundation and figuratively with the certainty found in truth that is worthy of trust. The concept anticipates the words of Jesus, "Whosoever cometh to me, and heareth my sayings, and doeth them, I will shew you to whom he is like. He is like a man who built a house, and digged deep, and laid the foundation on a rock: and when the flood arose, the stream beat vehemently upon that house, and could not shake it: for it was founded upon a rock. But he that heareth and doeth not, is like a man that without a foundation built a house upon the earth; against which the stream did beat vehemently, and immediately it fell; and the ruin of that house was great."³⁷⁵ If the word of truth in the psalmist's mouth is one witness, then the stability of his life built upon that word of truth is another as well. In Jesus' picture, the 'immutability' of the bedrock is manifest in the 'stability' of the house built on it. Another nail-like example of a transmitted attribute.

- *The psalmist knows that his testimony entirely depends upon God's kindness.*

Lastly, we come to the final petition of this prayer, "*Do not snatch the word of truth from my mouth, for I have put my hope in your law*³⁷⁶." Whether God would do such a thing is a moot point. The psalmist is not saying here that he believes that God will do this, only that if He does, everything in the psalmist's life would collapse; his testimony becoming null and void. His adversaries, hostile to him (and to God) would have won their argument. The fear evident in this petition is a component of the fear of God that is consonant with this octave that acknowledges that everything depends of God.

The notion of timing is interesting here. Is the deliverance sought in verse 40b yet future, already past, or ongoing? Though the event may seem to be yet future at the start of the prayer,³⁷⁷ of necessity, the deliverance must actually have been granted before one can answer naysayers that one has been delivered. So, the argument of this prayer may not just rest upon the psalmist being God's servant to whom God has the responsibility to deliver from death. The argument may be that if God does not answer the psalmist's petition for quickening, then the psalmist (and God) will have the psalmist's effectual witness to God's mercy destroyed and his naysayers will win to God's dishonor. If God does answer, however, it will be manifest to all that God has not taken away the word of truth from his mouth, that judgment of pardon in which the psalmist hopes.

³⁷⁵ Luke 6:47-49

³⁷⁶ The word here translated laws is מִשְׁפָּט mishpat (pronounced mish-pawt') meaning, properly, a verdict (favorable or unfavorable) pronounced judicially, especially a sentence or formal decree.

³⁷⁷ After all, why should we pray for what we have already received? Hebrews 11:1 "Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen."

Cause and Effect

- ⁴¹ Let thy mercies come also unto me, O LORD,
Even thy salvation, according to thy word.
- ⁴² So shall I have wherewith to answer him that reproacheth me:
For I trust in thy word.
- ⁴³ And take not the word of truth utterly out of my mouth;
For I have hoped in thy judgments.
- ⁴⁴ So shall I keep thy law continually
For ever and ever.



There is in these four verses a certain back and forth between the divine answer in response to his prayer that the psalmist anticipates and what the psalmist says that he will do. This is not, however, *quid pro quo* bargaining on the psalmist's part. It is rather a testimony that the viability of his actions depends utterly upon God. If God answers his prayer, then he tells us what he will be able to do. The psalmist's petition is coherent both in its positive expression (41 a – let thy mercies come unto me...) and its negative expression (43a – and take not the word of truth out of my mouth...). This oneness can be better understood if we think of a parent bird feeding a fledging. The fact that the parent bird places food in the mouth of the chick is that chick's salvation. If it could speak, the chick might logically plead don't take this food out of my mouth. The psalmist is not being kept in a living relationship with God by means of physical food (worms or road kill) but by every word (אמרה 'imrah) that the Father speaks. As God does this, the psalmist is enabled, by that very word, to answer his adversaries. This is similar to our Lord's case with His adversary.

“And when he had fasted forty days and forty nights, he was afterward an hungred. And when the tempter came to him, he said, ‘If thou be the Son of God, command that these stones be made bread.’ But he answered and said, ‘It is written, Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God.’” ³⁷⁸

Just as the chick's response to the food offered by the parent is to open its mouth, so the psalmist's response the word of the LORD is faith. “...according to Thy saying ... I answer him ... for I have trusted in Thy word.”

Although the two parts of the prayer are really the same petition in its positive and negative aspects (“let thy” and “take not”), the responses dependent on the answer are very different. The first response, “So shall I have wherewith to answer him that reproacheth me:” is clearly relational. It speaks of the psalmist's behavior in the world

³⁷⁸ Matthew 4:2-4

of men. It speaks of his testimony. The second response, "And I keep Thy law continually," speaks of his behavior in God's economy. It speaks of obedience. The fact that (relative to obedience) the psalmist refers to time, "to the age and forever," is significant. It is a statement in two parts. The later, "So shall I keep thy law continually for ever and ever." is full of hope. It hints that the continual obedience foretold will be realized in the endless ages of eternity - the world to come. He does not promise; he predicts that one day his obedience will be perfect and shame at failure find no place in the emotional spectrum of his life. The psalmist has great hope: "Because for Thy judgment I have hoped." (43b)

Youngs literal translation presents the last cola in two parts as "... To the age and forever." The former, "to the age," speaks of obedience in his present world. Clearly the psalmist was not satisfied with the tenor of his relationship with God at the start of this psalm. "O that my ways were directed to keep thy statutes! Then shall I not be ashamed, when I have respect unto all thy commandments."³⁷⁹ In this world we have the partial obedience of the psalmist and the testimony of a forgiven sinner to his naysayers, but in the world to come, a servant perfectly obedient to God. Both of these remarkable consequences flow from the word that God speaks in pardoning mercy to the repentant and believing sinner.

Obedience and testimony are two critical issues in the life of every child of God. What we say (our testimony) and what we do (our obedience) both reflect upon Him whose identity we claim affiliation with. What is critical for us to understand is that both depend wholly upon God's merciful word spoken to us, believed on by us, and therefore experienced by us in vivifying power. There are two 'directions' in all our lives: 'horizontally' toward the people we deal with (who are often hostile and reproaching) and 'vertically' toward God. And these two directions intersect in each of us. We live in two worlds, the present visible world all around us and the presently unseen world to come. They are simultaneous, so that what happens in one effects what happens in the other. This reality undergirds much in our spiritual lives. Our testimony and our obedience can convince those around us of the possibility of living a life in fellowship with God. We can be the channels through which God speaks the word of salvation to the lost. Even if they do not accept our testimony; nevertheless, we give glory to God in our daily lives by both.

"Beloved, think it not strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened unto you: But rejoice, inasmuch as ye are partakers of Christ's sufferings; that, when his glory shall be revealed, ye may be glad also with exceeding joy. If ye be reproached for the name of Christ, happy are ye; for the spirit of glory and of God resteth upon you: on their part he is evil spoken of, but on your part he is glorified. But let

³⁷⁹ Psalm 119:5, 6

none of you suffer as a murderer, or as a thief, or as an evildoer, or as a busybody in other men's matters. Yet if any man suffer as a Christian, let him not be ashamed; but let him glorify God on this behalf." ³⁸⁰

It is possible when considering an octave described by ו (vau) to mistakenly believe that since all depends upon God, that nothing depends upon me. The psalmist does not say that. Throughout the octave, he asserts that, the reality of God's answer is borne out by what he does and will do. Personal activity abounds in this octave: "So shall I have wherewith to answer him that reproaches me ... So shall I keep thy law continually for ever and ever. ... I will walk at liberty...I will speak of thy testimonies also before kings, and will not be ashamed. ... I will delight myself in thy commandments ... My hands also will I lift up unto thy commandments... and I will meditate in thy statutes." Again, the apostle Paul admonishes us: "work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure."³⁸¹ It is relationship that is important to the psalmist, not an abstract end state! And a right relationship with God requires activity on both parties. God, being perfect and immutable, does not change and has no need to. We, on the other hand, being incapacitated sinners, mutable, peccable, and necessarily the objects of mercy, need to make use of all that God, in His infinite mercy has vouchsafed to us at such cost to Himself and His Son, Jesus Christ, in working out that salvation. Ultimately all really does depend on God, but in His mercy, he has given us our part to play and we need to play that part well.

Transformation by Truth

- ⁴³ And take not the word of truth utterly out of my mouth;
For I have hoped in thy judgments.
⁴⁴ So shall I keep thy law continually
For ever and ever.



The previous lesson presented the notion of an argument which tied the psalmist's plea to his nay-saying adversaries. In that case, if God ever did "take the word of truth utterly out of" the psalmist's mouth, his reproachful adversaries would have gained the advantage not only over the psalmist but God as well. For whom will there be (the psalmist intimates) to answer their base slanders directed not just against me as your servant but against You, my merciful master? Such external relations, however, are neither the only issue, nor are they the primary one. This psalm is focused, primarily, on the psalmist's relationship with God, a relationship that he ultimately desires to be

³⁸⁰ 1 Peter 4:12 - 16

³⁸¹ Philippians 2:12b-13

happy (blessed - אֵשֶׁר 'esher). Central to that blessedness is walking undefiled in the way prescribed by the law of the LORD, keeping his testimonies, and seeking him with the whole heart. It involves doing no iniquity. The psalmist understands clearly that obedience is critical to happiness and even to life itself.³⁸² Verses 43 and 44 link the psalmist's divinely enabled testimony and to that obedience central to blessedness. If God does not take "the word of truth utterly out of my mouth," says the psalmist, then I shall keep thy law continually. Again, these verses are not a *quid pro quo* argument. Such an argument would not be consistent with the central theme of this octave that maintains that everything depends on God. A *quid pro quo* argument would imply that the psalmist really does have some choice as to whether or not he will serve God. Such a view would reduce verses 43 and 44 to something like this: "God, if You don't take the word of truth out of my mouth utterly (i.e. if You don't use your "bargaining chip"), then I will keep your law continually (i.e. then, I won't use my "bargaining chip")." Such a view is not only wrong; it is blasphemous of God and scandalous of the psalmist. If the psalmist does indeed have such a bargaining chip, why plead for mercy, just bargain for advantage. Besides telling us that the psalmist is utterly dependent on God's mercy (as are we all); verses 43 and 44 present something new in the psalmist's search for the supreme bliss of a harmonious relationship with the Creator of the Universe. They present a dependency between what we say and what we do. If the word of truth continually abides in our mouth, then the law of God will continually govern our will.

How can this be? The answer seems simple if we maintain that thought should precede both word and deed. But our experience shows us that thought, though influential, does not always govern the will. We act, in many instances, out of fear, anger, or some other strong emotional response that overpowers our will. There is another factor in play: the indwelling principle that corrupts human nature – Sin. There are many instances in all our lives when we knew the right thing to do and didn't. We can all say with the Apostle Paul: "I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members." In the face of evidence to the contrary, how can the psalmist then believe that what he says will govern what he does? The objections raised thus far rest upon our notion of where cognition takes place. The understanding that thought precedes both word and deed and psalmist's assertion that the word of truth in his mouth will have a beneficial effect on his will come together as a variant of the familiar aphorism, "as a man thinketh in his heart so is he." This aphorism derives from a similar but more focused passage in Proverbs, "Eat thou not the bread of him that hath an evil eye, neither desire thou his

³⁸² The notion is not unique to the psalmist. Our Lord Jesus underscores this critical truth. "And, behold, a certain lawyer stood up, and tempted him, saying, Master, what shall I do to inherit eternal life? He said unto him, 'What is written in the law? How readeest thou?' And he answering said, 'Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy strength, and with all thy mind; and thy neighbor as thyself.' And he said unto him, 'Thou hast answered right: this do, and thou shalt live.'" Luke 10:25 - 28

dainty meats: For as he thinketh in his heart, so is he: Eat and drink, saith he to thee; but his heart is not with thee."³⁸³ The key observation is that the cognitive process is taking place in the heart. It is in the heart of man that the battle is taking place. When "The fool hath said in his heart, There is no God"; should we wonder that, "They are corrupt, they have done abominable works, (*and*) there is none that doeth good."³⁸⁴ Must we tax our imagination to see God's grief when He says, "This people draweth nigh unto me with their mouth, and honoreth me with their lips; but their heart is far from me."?³⁸⁵ And how distressing should be the universal condemnation of all our hearts by the prophet; "The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked: who can know it?"³⁸⁶ How vain are the attempts of the mind of man to discern "words of truth" apart from the glory of God? "Because that, when they knew God, they glorified him not as God, neither were thankful; but became vain in their imaginations, and their foolish heart was darkened. Professing themselves to be wise, they became fools,..."³⁸⁷

There is a clear link between the thoughts of the heart and the words of the lips, "For every tree is known by his own fruit. For of thorns men do not gather figs, nor of a bramble bush gather they grapes. A good man out of the good treasure of his heart bringeth forth that which is good; and an evil man out of the evil treasure of his heart bringeth forth that which is evil: for of the abundance of the heart his mouth speaketh."³⁸⁸ The importance that these verses bear to the spiritual life lies not in witness to the word of truth in the mouth, but to the hand of God operative in the heart! It is the word of truth that the psalmist has hidden in his heart (119:11) that has transformed the words of the psalmist's lips. And if the hand of God does not remove that internalized word of truth, then it will also transform both the will and the emotions, so that what the psalmist does will not only be according to the law of the LORD, but it will be a joyous expression of his love for God. Truth, received by the heart, is a liberating transformation. "Ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free."³⁸⁹ We have noted in previous lessons what a great promise of God was given to a perpetually sinning Israel: "A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you: and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you an heart of flesh."³⁹⁰ The heart transformation, at which the psalmist hints, is also both complete and irreversible. The psalmist says "So shall I keep thy law continually (*completeness*) for ever and ever (*irreversibility*)."

³⁸³ Proverbs 23:6-7

³⁸⁴ Psalm 14:1

³⁸⁵ Matthew 15:8

³⁸⁶ Jeremiah 17:9

³⁸⁷ Romans 1:21-22

³⁸⁸ Luke 6:44-45, see also Matthew 12:34-35

³⁸⁹ John 8:32

³⁹⁰ Ezekiel 36:26

Finally, there is the question of the instrumentality of such a heart transforming event. When Jesus announced that the truth shall make you free, His detractors objected that their freedom derived from Abraham. But it is not Abraham (the Old Covenant of Law) that brings the freedom of obedience; it is Jesus (the New Covenant of Grace) that changes everything. “If the Son therefore shall make you free, ye shall be free indeed.”³⁹¹

External Consequences

- ⁴³ And take not the word of truth utterly out of my mouth;
For I have hoped in thy judgments.
- ⁴⁴ So shall I keep thy law continually
For ever and ever.
- ⁴⁵ And I will walk at liberty:
for I seek thy precepts.
- ⁴⁶ I will speak of thy testimonies also before kings,
and will not be ashamed.



In 7 (vau) we have been considering how all depends upon God. The instrumentality in consideration in these last few verses has been the word of truth. The reason that the verbal communication of truth can have such a transforming effect on the life lies not only the power of the One who speaks it, but in what part of our being that vivifying communication takes root – the heart. Jesus explained this reality in the parable of all parables, the sower and the seed. The good seed of the gospel falls in many places. In some cases, it has no lasting effect. The seed is viable in all cases but the condition of the hearts of those who hear it determines what will happen. For some, who are hardened by sin, the word never enters. For some, who are preoccupied with wealth, the seed never receives full consideration and remains fruitless. There are some who are marked by hidden unbelief so that, although they appear to believe the word that they hear, in time of trial they fall away. But there are others whose prepared hearts receive the word and it brings forth fruit. Verses 44 to 46 also speak of some of these external consequences, these visible fruits: obedience (44), liberty (45), and a fearless gospel testimony (46).

Obedience: “So shall I keep thy law continually for ever and ever.” The obedience spoken of by the psalmist is not only temporal but eternal. It is “for ever and ever.” Furthermore, it is motivated by inner consequences like delight (47a) and love (47b). The psalmist’s will has not been gripped by an overwhelming force. Rather it has been embraced by the desire for both beauty and truth. It is, above all, *willing obedience*.

³⁹¹ John 8:32-37

Liberty: “And I will walk at liberty: for I seek thy precepts.” The presence of curbs on the roadside does not prevent us from going where we desire to go. Obedience to the commandments is not against freedom but an expression of freedom. But it is not the law that does this. As mentioned in the previous lesson, it is not Abraham (the Old Covenant of Law) that brings the freedom of obedience; it is Jesus (the New Covenant of Grace) that changes everything. “If the Son therefore shall make you free, ye shall be free indeed.”³⁹² It is the very Jeshua who is the Truth, who the psalmist awaits, without fully comprehending Him.

A fearless gospel testimony: “I will speak of thy testimonies also before kings, and will not be ashamed.” The seed sown always produces seed after its own kind. Wheat produces wheat; oats produce oats; barley produces barley; and so on. The good seed of the gospel produces a sound gospel testimony. The word of truth, sown in the heart, produces the word of truth spoken by the mouth. Linked as the receipt of the word of the LORD is to the fear of the LORD, the receipt of the word of truth in the heart produces a fearlessness when it comes to those with whom we have to deal.³⁹³

Coherency: Because each of these external consequences has the same root cause, there is a coherency in each of their manifestations that argues the presence of truth in the heart. The implications of this are startling and sometimes counterintuitive. For instance, people often think of obedience as a constraint on the will. Obedience to the will of another seems antithetical to true freedom which is commonly seen as an expression of self-direction. But the psalmist clearly tells us that obedience to God’s law is exactly that in which true liberty consists. Furthermore, truth in the heart is a natural defense against the universal tendency to hypocrisy. The psalmist’s words and the psalmist’s life both agree. He tells us that he will live out what he preaches. Liberty under the law of God is freedom of speech without fear of a contradictory life (“so shall I have wherewith to answer him that reproacheth me”) or fear of powerful persons (“I will speak of thy testimonies also before kings, and will not be ashamed”). There are many such coherent correlations among these consequential statements all of which point us to the attributes of authenticity in the spiritual life.

Mutuality: Not only are the consequential results in verses 44 to 48 desirable from the psalmist’s point of view to achieve a harmonious relationship with the LORD, but they are also the very ends that God, in His love, wills for the benefit of his servant, the psalmist. The psalmist acquaints us with the important realization that the Lord desires that all His children experience the joy of obedient freedom, that they should love

³⁹² John 8:32-37

³⁹³ Proverbs 29:25 - 26

The fear of man bringeth a snare:

But whoso putteth his trust in the LORD shall be safe.

Many seek the ruler’s favour;

But every man’s judgment cometh from the LORD.

others made in the image of God as He loves them, though that image be marred and distorted, that they should not just know but understand His will and speak openly and truly of Him to all persons including those who by reason of wealth have the least desire to know him. How tragic that wealth should be at once the most severe of spiritual trials³⁹⁴ and the one which puts the soul thus tried farthest from those who can help them by their witness. Who thinks, who dares, to take up a lament for Pharaoh?³⁹⁵

Internal Consequences

⁴³ And take not the word of truth utterly out of my mouth;

...

⁴⁷ And I will delight myself in thy commandments,
Which I have loved.

⁴⁸ My hands also will I lift up unto thy commandments,
Which I have loved;

And I will meditate in thy statutes.



Perhaps the most important consequence of truth sown by God in the human heart is a renewed ability to love. It is ultimately love which must lie at the root of all obedience, not fear or guilt. Love, as God would have us exercise it, has a threefold focus: God, our neighbor, and ourselves.³⁹⁶ Commandments regulate relationship. Living out the commandments, then, changes our relationship with God, with our neighbor, and with our self. Twice over the psalmist tells God (and us) that he loves God's commandments. That love brings with it delight in the commandments (47a), and encourages both confidence in their validity (48a) and meditation on them (48b). Here again we find a well-balanced picture of how the soul behaves when it encounters Truth. The ensuing

³⁹⁴ Revelation 3:16 – 19 “So then because thou art lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spew thee out of my mouth. Because thou sayest, I am rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing; and knowest not that thou art wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked: I counsel thee to buy of me gold tried in the fire, that thou mayest be rich; and white raiment, that thou mayest be clothed, and that the shame of thy nakedness do not appear; and anoint thine eyes with eye salve, that thou mayest see. As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten: be zealous therefore, and repent.

³⁹⁵ Ezekiel 32:2-8 “Son of man, take up a lamentation (*i.e. sing a dirge*) for Pharaoh, king of Egypt, and say unto him, Thou art like a young lion of the nations, and thou art as a whale in the seas: and thou camest forth with thy rivers, and troubledst the waters with thy feet, and fouledst their rivers. Thus saith the Lord GOD; ‘I will therefore spread out my net over thee with a company of many people; and they shall bring thee up in my net. Then will I leave thee upon the land, I will cast thee forth upon the open field, and will cause all the fowls of the heaven to remain upon thee, and I will fill the beasts of the whole earth with thee. And I will lay thy flesh upon the mountains, and fill the valleys with thy height. I will also water with thy blood the land wherein thou swimst, even to the mountains; and the rivers shall be full of thee And when I shall put thee out, I will cover the heaven, and make the stars thereof dark; I will cover the sun with a cloud, and the moon shall not give her light. All the bright lights of heaven will I make dark over thee, and set darkness upon thy land, saith the Lord GOD.’

³⁹⁶ Matthew 22:37-39 Jesus said unto him, “Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself.” What Jesus is saying here is not only that there are three objects of love (God, neighbor, and self) but that the love that is shown to each must be exactly the same in character. There is much said about love nowadays but the notions often fall far short. The classic exposition of the love of God that is shed abroad in the hearts of people is found in the familiar chapter 13 of Paul's first letter to the Corinthians. (q.v.)

heart transformation alters the affections (I will delight), the will (I will lift up my hands), and cognition (I will meditate).

Delight - As an expression of His love for us, God meant for our relationships to be marked by delight.³⁹⁷ Holiness is not a sour disposition. The saints of every age have had troubles, but when they progressed in godliness they were often delightful people to be with. The annals of hagiography are filled with what appear to be specious stories of miraculous powers granted to people who were known for their sanctity. Doubtless some of this comes from the belief that saints should mirror the miraculous exploits of Jesus.³⁹⁸ But Jesus and the saints had another, lesser observed characteristic: children loved them because they were not frightening, forbidding or harsh.

“And they brought young children to him, that he should touch them: and his disciples rebuked those that brought them. But when Jesus saw it, he was much displeased, and said unto them, ‘Suffer the little children to come unto me, and forbid them not: for of such is the kingdom of God. Verily I say unto you, whosoever shall not receive the kingdom of God as a little child, he shall not enter therein.’ And he took them up in his arms, put his hands upon them, and blessed them.”³⁹⁹

Saints are known for their compassion on those whom the world despises: the child, the weak, the defenseless, the orphan, the disabled, the sick, the aged, and the vulnerable. They have compassion on them because they are made in the image of the God whom they love. Indeed, the weak and vulnerable were protected by their prayers and care. Despite later distortions, the great social works of Christianity – hospitals, facilities for emotionally disturbed people, homes for the orphan, the indigent, and care of widows and elderly all had their roots in the love of God shed aboard in the heart.⁴⁰⁰ Great saints were also known to be kind to animals. All of suffering creation (birds, animals, plant-life, and even inanimate nature itself) found an audience with their conscience. Delight in nature went hand in hand with love of God’s creation. Saints delight in nature in general and humanity in particular. It is the commandments that point the way to relational delight.

Lifting up the hands - In the Psalmist’s day, lifting up the hands signified a posture of prayer involving recognition and worship.⁴⁰¹ The psalmist is not, however, praying to

³⁹⁷ Psalm 119:1 - אֵשֶׁר 'esher - happiness; in masculine plural construction as interjection, oh how happy!

³⁹⁸ John 14:11-13 “Believe me that I am in the Father, and the Father in me: or else believe me for the very works’ sake. Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that believeth on me, the works that I do shall he do also; and greater works than these shall he do; because I go unto my Father. And whatsoever ye shall ask in my name, that will I do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son.” Doubtless Jesus was referring to the many significant miracles He performed. But we must ask ourselves, what is the character of the ‘greater works’ should I ask for; sign miracles to aggrandize me? Or remarkable acts of mercy to alleviate human suffering and encourage fallen humanity to accept the Good News of Jesus’ saving work on the cross?

³⁹⁹ Mark 10:13 - 16

⁴⁰⁰ James 1:27 Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this, To visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and to keep himself unspotted from the world.

⁴⁰¹ Psalm 28:2 Hear the voice of my supplications, when I cry unto thee, when I lift up my hands toward thy holy oracle.

the commandments as if they were God. Rather he is recognizing that with every command there is a promised consequence of good in response to obedience. But the psalmist further knows that, as all depends of God, then his fulfillment of the command also rests upon God's faithfulness. Each command represents a promise of God's grace to enable its fulfillment as well as a reward for obedience. The command conveys not only awareness of what is right but the power necessary for its fulfillment. To love the commandments, means to love what the commandments are capable of doing in human hearts and how that would affect human relationships. Just imagine how different this world would be if even a few of the Decalogue were universally observed by humanity: thou shalt not steal; thou shalt not kill; thou shalt not covet? Are not such things much to be desired and prayed for?

Meditation – As noted in earlier, while all really does depend on God, this does not mean that there is nothing for us to do. There is an interior work of enlarging the understanding that goes hand in hand with assimilation. Much depends on how we see the commandments. Imagine, if you will, the commandments as a title deed to a piece of land beneath which there lies a great treasure, say gemstones of great size, beautiful color, dazzling clarity, and surpassing rarity, in short, gemstones of enormous value. And you have been given the deed to that property. Those gemstones are yours – for the taking! What will you do; lie idly in a lawn chair consoling yourself that you are now rich. Meditation is like mining for hidden gems. Each discovery only further whets the appetite for new acquisitions. It awakens the insatiable appetite, not for wealth, but for God! Meditation transforms potential energy to kinetic energy. It is work that does work. "Blessed is the man that ... (whose) delight is in the law of the LORD; and in his law doth he meditate day and night."⁴⁰²

Psalm 134:1-2 Behold, bless ye the LORD, all ye servants of the LORD, which by night stand in the house of the LORD. Lift up your hands in the sanctuary, and bless the LORD.

Lamentations 2:19 Arise, cry out in the night: in the beginning of the watches pour out thine heart like water before the face of the Lord: lift up thy hands toward him for the life of thy young children, that faint for hunger in the top of every street.

⁴⁰² Psalm 1:1a & 2 (extracted)

ז (ZAIN)

☞ The Power of the Word ☞

49 Remember the word⁴⁰³ unto thy servant,
Upon which thou hast caused me to hope.
50 This is my comfort in my affliction:
For thy word⁴⁰⁴ hath quickened me.

☞ The Proud a Trial ☞

51 The proud have had me greatly in derision:
Yet have I not declined from thy law.
52 I remembered thy judgments of old, O LORD;
And have comforted myself.
53 Horror hath taken hold upon me
Because of the wicked that forsake thy law

☞ Deliverance by the Word ☞

54 Thy statutes have been my songs
In the house of my pilgrimage
55 I have remembered thy name, O LORD,
In the night, and have kept thy law.
56 This I had,
Because I kept thy precepts

☞

ז - **Zain** means a sword as a weapon to cut or pierce. The octave begins with a two-fold reference to the word. The word of God is likened to a sword by the writer to the Hebrews.⁴⁰⁵ John sees the risen and glorified Christ as one out of whose mouth the word proceeds like a sharp two-edged sword.⁴⁰⁶ The act of uttering a memorable judgment (53) is a significantly decisive act. Jesus answers the young man who comes to him seeking a judgment between himself and his brother over an inheritance by asking him the question, “Man, who made me a judge or a divider over you?” Judges, like swords, are dividers.⁴⁰⁷

⁴⁰³ דָּבָר *dabar*, a word; by implication, a matter or thing spoken of. In this application it refers to a promise that caused the psalmist to hope (48b).

⁴⁰⁴ אִמְרָה *imrah*, meaning a commandment, a speech, or a word. In this case the implication is much more general. It is a command by which the psalmist was caused to live (“quickened” – 50a)

⁴⁰⁵ Hebrews 4:12 “For the word of God is quick, and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart.”

⁴⁰⁶ Revelation 1:16 “And he had in his right hand seven stars: and out of his mouth went a sharp two-edged sword: and his countenance was as the sun shineth in his strength.”

⁴⁰⁷ Luke 12:13-14 “And one of the company said unto him, Master, speak to my brother, that he divide the inheritance with me. And he said unto him, Man, who made me a judge or a divider over you?”

A sword cuts two ways. It is an instrument of life and death, life to the one who wields it well and death to the one who does not. Death and life are in the power of the tongue..." says the writer of Proverbs.⁴⁰⁸ Of the words that He speaks, Jesus says "the words that I speak unto you, they are spirit, and they are life."⁴⁰⁹

But this passage is not so much about creating divisions as it is about the psalmist's need to be comforted in various troubles. In this octave pain and comfort are intermingled throughout. The psalmist sees himself both as "thy servant" (49a) and as a pilgrim (54b). In this dual role, his sufferings are manifest. These include affliction (50a), derision (51a), being seized by a boiling anger with those who would rebel against God's governance⁴¹⁰ (53), and the general discomforts of his pilgrimage (i.e. the sadness and weariness of the long way – 54), and the night (i.e. the times of spiritual darkness and depression that have beset him along the way – 55b).

The psalmist's comforts are also manifest. They are hope in God's word (49), God's life-giving command (50), the comforts of God's ancient judgments ⁴¹¹ (52), and songs ... in the night (54a ... 55b). The psalmist's prayer in this octave is singular and well supported. He asks God to "remember" the word to him that has been such a comfort (49a) because he has "remembered" both God's judgments (52a) and His name even when things seemed most dark (55).

We might well ask ourselves how all these find meaning through the lens of זַיִן – zain, a sword? How does a sword-like word bring comfort? To answer that question, we must consider the source of the psalmist's pain as well as why his comfort is as it is.

The world that calls the psalmist-pilgrim a stranger, is a world sunk in sin. Sin results in a shift the locus of control from within the individual to that which is not God. Sin brings bondage with all its attendant sufferings.⁴¹² It does this by means of untruth that is meant to deceive. A cursory review of recent social upheavals presents convincing evidence that this is so. Revolutions that usher in even more repressive governments than the ones they supplant often do so under the banner of "liberation" or "the peoples'" this or that. Whether it is a war of 'liberation' or the rise of the 'peoples' party' the real intent of the new power seekers is the selfish control not only of wealth but of

⁴⁰⁸ Proverbs 18:21

⁴⁰⁹ John 6:63 It is the spirit that quickeneth; the flesh profiteth nothing: the words that I speak unto you, they are spirit, and they are life.

⁴¹⁰ The word translated "Horror" in the KJV is זַלְעַפָּה (pronounced zal-aw-faw') meaning a glow of wind or of anger. The word comes from זָעַף (pronounced zaw-af') a primitive root meaning (properly) to boil up, but figuratively to be peevish or to be very angry. Hence the psalmist has been seized with a boiling anger at human rebellion against God that he finds frightening and disquieting. We might say he is seething with an uncontrollable anger.

⁴¹¹ The reference to "judgments of old" is comforting because it speaks of the stability of God's word, which has stood the test of time. It looks ahead to the psalmist's opening comment in verse 89: "For ever, O LORD, thy word is settled in heaven."

⁴¹² John 8:33 - 36 "They answered him, 'We be Abraham's seed, and were never in bondage to any man: how sayest thou, Ye shall be made free?' Jesus answered them, 'Verily, verily, I say unto you, Whosoever committeth sin is the servant of sin. And the servant abideth not in the house for ever: but the Son abideth ever. If the Son therefore shall make you free, ye shall be free indeed.'"

human souls. Such slavery in the name of freedom is marked by literary and artistic censorship as well as the quashing of all dissent. The most inviolate freedom (thought) will be the first to be actively suppressed. Where banned books are burned, people who want to read them soon follow. Vilification and dehumanization of people, who differ from the status quo of the new power base, are the precursors to their genocide. With the psalmist the derisions of proud (51a) were preceded by the princes who did sit and speak against him (23) and will be followed by the princes that persecute him without a cause (161).

God is not so. He does not seek to manipulate the human will. He does not wrest the locus of control from within us to Himself. In loving us, He gives us the ultimate freedom, to choose to love Him in return. Sadly, many people choose not to reciprocate His ineffable and selfless love. Yet He still chooses to love those that He knows will not love Him back. For those who do love Him and His word, as the psalmist does, there is the sad discovery that sin has already rewired the locus of control within so that, although we desire to love God and express that love in voluntary submission, we are not able. We are trapped in the bondage of Sin within, a bondage resting on a lie. Hence, we find the need for the two-edged sword of His word. The first edge, truth, cuts through the lies that brought bondage in the first place. The second edge, grace, enables us to live out the freedom that God intended for human kind to enjoy. Both edges express the character of God that John describes: light (truth) and love (grace).⁴¹³ The light of God's truth cuts painfully through all the lies which our old nature has accepted as the basis for building a life of happiness, (bringing death to our old lives lived in fellowship with a rebellious world) while the grace of God enables the new man to pick up the pieces of our shattered visage and slowly restore the image of God in our lives. It is † – zain, the two edged sword of the LORD, that brings the pain of repentance leading to freedom while bringing the comfort of faith, hope and love.

As a tool of deliverance, then, the sword separates the oppressed from their oppressors, comforting the former and judging the latter. Notice the differences or division the psalmist sees between himself and the proud or arrogant (51a) on the one hand and the wicked that forsake thy law on the other (53b). In the hand of God, the sword of His Word is a great comfort because it encourages him in difficult circumstances. It gives the psalmist inner strength.⁴¹⁴ The presence of God's strength as manifest by the power

⁴¹³ 1 John 1:5 This then is the message which we have heard of him, and declare unto you, that God is light, and in him is no darkness at all. ... 1 John 4:16 And we have known and believed the love that God hath to us. God is love; and he that dwelleth in love dwelleth in God, and God in him. ... John 1:14, 17 And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth. ... For the law was given by Moses, but grace and truth came by Jesus Christ.

⁴¹⁴ Our word comfort comes from the Latin *confortar*: *con* (with) + *fortis* (strength). That is to be comforted is to be imparted new strength. The Hebrew word translated comfort in verse 50a is נְחָמָה *nechamah*, (pronounced nek-h-aw-maw'), meaning consolation or comfort. It is used only here and in Job 6:10. It derives from the more common primitive root נָחַם *nacham* (pronounced naw-

of His sword-word is a great restorer of courage in the midst of affliction (humiliation – 50a), derision (51a), desertion (53), depression (i.e. “songs ... in the night” – 54, 55). We catch a glimpse of this comfort and even happiness in the final blessing of Moses upon Israel.

*“The eternal God is thy refuge, and underneath are the everlasting arms: and he shall thrust out the enemy from before thee; and shall say, Destroy them. Israel then shall dwell in safety alone: the fountain of Jacob shall be upon a land of corn and wine; also his heavens shall drop down dew. Happy art thou, O Israel: who is like unto thee, O people saved by the LORD, the shield of thy help, and who is the sword of thy excellency! and thine enemies shall be found liars unto thee; and thou shalt tread upon their high places.”*⁴¹⁵

We come at last to the realization that the Sword of the LORD is the Eternal Word, even our Lord Jesus.

“The sword of thy excellency” or whose sword, his all-conquering WORD, is thine excellency, in its promises, threatenings, precepts, &c., &c. St. Paul, in his exhortation to the Christians at Ephesus, uses the same metaphor, Take unto you the SWORD of the SPIRIT, which is the WORD of GOD.”

- Adam Clark

Great Faith

⁴⁹ Remember the word unto thy servant,
Upon which thou hast caused me to hope.
⁵⁰ This is my comfort in my affliction:
For thy word hath quickened me.



The opening prayer of this octave raises the interesting question whether God can forget? Both in regard to mercy⁴¹⁶ and in regard to judgment⁴¹⁷ God says that He will forget. Yet we speculate, from our tendency to forget, that forgetting would completely negate the attribute of God’s omniscience. To forget something effectually removes it from our awareness and represents the diminishing of our knowledge, and the truncation of our ability to take effectual action. Since God cannot cease from His omniscience (i.e. He is immutable), what does the psalmist mean when he pleads that God would not forget the specific word to his servant, a word that has caused him to hope that God will deliver him from those around him who ill treat him. When we

kham') used in verse 52 that means, properly, to sigh, or breathe strongly. It carries with it the sense of catching one’s breath or recovering one’s strength.

⁴¹⁵ Deuteronomy 33:27-29

⁴¹⁶ Isaiah 43:25 I, even I, am he that blotteth out thy transgressions for mine own sake, and will not remember thy sins.

⁴¹⁷ Jeremiah 23:39 Therefore, behold, I, even I, will utterly forget you, and I will forsake you, and the city that I gave you and your fathers, and cast you out of my presence:

forget a pot on the stove and the water boils off so that the pot melts, we experience a most undesirable result. Had we remembered, we would not have suffered the pot to be lost. But we took no action because we forgot the pot was there. It is in this sense that the psalmist pleads with God not to forget His word. The psalmist is not questioning God's fidelity, but chafing under painful situations while waiting for God to redeem the promise that gave him hope and comfort in his affliction.

This octave is colored by ז (zain) the sword. For the psalmist, the word is a sword of deliverance from affliction because it represents not just a promise of deliverance but a word of judgment of those who afflict him (50a), deride him (51a), who greatly anger him by reason of their lawlessness (53). To have the LORD exercise Himself in the judgment of these offenders, would end the night of his suffering (55b) as well as the loneliness, sadness, and depression that attend his pilgrimage (54b). These two verses tell us that in giving of the word, the LORD has produced three inter-related effects already: hope, comfort, and life.

Hope: "The word ... upon which thou hast caused me to hope." When we have a sense that God has communicated to us specifically, He gives us hope that by reason of His omnipotent intervention everything will work out all right. Hope is a confident expectation that what God has promised, He will fulfill.

Comfort: "The word unto thy servant, upon which thou hast caused me to hope, is my comfort in my affliction." Suffering always seems to raise at least two questions: Why am I suffering thus? And how long this suffering will continue?

Life: Suffering, unrelieved, can cause a host of painful emotional responses including a feeling of loneliness and isolation,⁴¹⁸ or of depression and despondency.⁴¹⁹ Such heaviness of heart can sap the emotional energy and bring the sufferer into the very dust of death.⁴²⁰ The word of the LORD, given in the midst of his afflictions has also given the psalmist renewed spiritual energy to go on with his life; "thy word hath quickened me."

But hope, comfort, and even the restoration of a spiritual life hanging in the balance are not enough. The psalmist needs to see action. He pleads that his faith will give way to

⁴¹⁸ 1 Kings 19:9 – 10 "And he came thither unto a cave, and lodged there; and, behold, the word of the LORD came to him, and he said unto him, 'What doest thou here, Elijah?' And he said, 'I have been very jealous for the LORD God of hosts: for the children of Israel have forsaken thy covenant, thrown down thine altars, and slain thy prophets with the sword; and I, even I only, am left; and they seek my life, to take it away.'

⁴¹⁹ Ecclesiastes 2:17-20 "Therefore I hated life; because the work that is wrought under the sun is grievous unto me: for all is vanity and vexation of spirit. Yea, I hated all my labor which I had taken under the sun: because I should leave it unto the man that shall be after me. And who knoweth whether he shall be a wise man or a fool? ...This is also vanity. Therefore I went about to cause my heart to despair of all the labor which I took under the sun."

⁴²⁰ How poignant are the words of David (and Jesus) in this realization of affliction causing one to despair of life itself. "Be not far from me; for trouble is near; for there is none to help. Many bulls have compassed me: strong bulls of Bashan have beset me round. They gaped upon me with their mouths, as a ravening and a roaring lion. I am poured out like water, and all my bones are out of joint: my heart is like wax; it is melted in the midst of my bowels. My strength is dried up like a potsherd; and my tongue cleaveth to my jaws; and thou hast brought me into the dust of death." Psalm 22:11-15

sight. There is no doubt that the psalmist's prayer is a prayer of faith and that waiting is a real trial of that faith. Faith is a capacity to give a visible evidence in our actions of which is not seen yet, but is nevertheless expected.⁴²¹ So why does God delay to answer prayers like this? There are lessons that the believer can learn in no other way but by the delay of God that gives space for their faith to grow in stature. Many times Jesus censured the disciples for smallness of faith.⁴²² There is also the realization of our utter dependency on God; that "without me ye can do nothing."⁴²³ This is so foreign to our sinful self-confidence and a difficult lesson that looks back to the preceding octave of *ἦ νῦν*, the hook, that tells us of the one on whom everything depends. God's many delays, from the 400 hundred years that Israel grew to a great people in Egyptian bondage to the delay in answering the desperate plea of the Syro-Phoenician woman, to demonstrate the greatness of her faith to the disciples;⁴²⁴ to the delay attending the death of Lazarus were all directed to giving temporal leeway so that the individual's faith might grow in stature. We know that faith, hope, and love abide into eternity,⁴²⁵ but for faith to give way to sight before faith has matured in trial is to guarantee the individual an eternally stunted capacity to believe. I believe that God is not satisfied with such a condition. The one thing that delighted Jesus in an otherwise bleak spiritual landscape of Israel we find in His words: "I have not found so great faith, no, not in Israel".⁴²⁶

Mindfulness in Adversity

⁵¹ The proud have had me greatly in derision:
yet have I not declined from thy law.

⁵² I remembered thy judgments of old, O LORD;
and have comforted myself.

⁴²¹ Hebrews 11:1 "Now faith is a well-grounded assurance of that for which we hope, and a conviction of the reality of things which we do not see." (Weymouth's Translation)

⁴²² In Matthew 6:30, 8:26, 14:31, 16:8 we find the rebuke "O ye of little faith"

⁴²³ John 15:5 "I am the vine, ye are the branches: He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit: for without me ye can do nothing."

⁴²⁴ Matthew 15:21-28 Then Jesus went thence, and departed into the coasts of Tyre and Sidon. And, behold, a woman of Canaan came out of the same coasts, and cried unto him, saying, Have mercy on me, O Lord, thou Son of David; my daughter is grievously vexed with a devil. But he answered her not a word. And his disciples came and besought him, saying, Send her away; for she crieth after us. But he answered and said, I am not sent but unto the lost sheep of the house of Israel. Then came she and worshipped him, saying, Lord, help me. But he answered and said, It is not meet to take the children's bread, and to cast it to dogs. And she said, Truth, Lord: yet the dogs eat of the crumbs which fall from their masters' table. Then Jesus answered and said unto her, O woman, great is thy faith: be it unto thee even as thou wilt. And her daughter was made whole from that very hour.

⁴²⁵ 1 Corinthians 13:12-13 "For now we see through a glass, darkly; but then face to face: now I know in part; but then shall I know even as also I am known. And now abideth faith, hope, love, these three; but the greatest of these is love."

⁴²⁶ Luke 7:6 - 9 "Then Jesus went with them. And when he was now not far from the house, the centurion sent friends to him, saying unto him, Lord, trouble not thyself: for I am not worthy that thou shouldst enter under my roof: ... For I also am a man set under authority, having under me soldiers, and I say unto one, Go, and he goeth; and to another, Come, and he cometh; and to my servant, Do this, and he doeth it. When Jesus heard these things, he marvelled at him, and turned him about, and said unto the people that followed him, 'I say unto you, I have not found so great faith, no, not in Israel.'"

While the first plea of this octave is for God to remember the word He has spoken to the psalmist (i.e. take action on His word), verse 52 tells us that the psalmist has remembered a critical portion of God's word, His judgments and that with this act of remembrance he has comforted himself. The reference to comfort in verse 52b doubtless looks back to the same word in verse 50a. In doing this, the psalmist gives us an important insight into just how God's word to him has given comfort that revived him when spiritual opposition (affliction by those who deride him) had almost caused him to faint. Clearly, the word of God is given to some as a comfort. But the individual to be comforted incurs a responsibility in the receipt of that word. The key to comfort lies with remembrance. As in all dependency on God, inactivity (and spiritual laziness) should not to be confused with faith. Faith recognizes that while we can never do everything that God has asked; there is always something that we can (and must) do as an evidence of our trust in God's all sufficient grace. It was so in our salvation⁴²⁷ and is so with our lives as well.⁴²⁸ In effect the psalmist is telling us that just as he is asking God to take action in redeeming the promises of His word in the psalmist's life, so the psalmist has taken action. The choice he has made lies in what he has focused his attention on: the judgments of God instead of the mockery of men. There is no doubt that he has been spiritually provoked by the self-willed behavior of those around him. He has been gripped by a towering rage at "the wicked who forsake thy law."⁴²⁹ So it is not just their mockery (51a) that has afflicted him but the very character of their godless and self-willed lives. But when the world around us abounds in wickedness, the psalmist is telling us, in effect: 'keep your eyes on God – particularly on his judgments which are coming.' This deliberate choice of the direction of our spiritual attention is one of the most fundamental disciplines that brings both for peace and joy in otherwise dark circumstances. Faith's focus on the LORD is at the root of prayer.⁴³⁰ And prayer with thanksgiving is at the root of peace in troubled times.⁴³¹ And peace is at the root of a silence that delivers us from a strife which would only prolong our suffering.⁴³² We

⁴²⁷ Ephesians 2:8 - 9 "For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: not of works, lest any man should boast."

⁴²⁸ Colossians 2:6-7 "As ye have therefore received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk ye in him: rooted and built up in him, and established in the faith, as ye have been taught, abounding therein with thanksgiving."

⁴²⁹ Psalm 119:53 Horror hath taken hold upon me (i.e. an overpowering rage has gripped him) because of the wicked that forsake thy law.

⁴³⁰ Hebrews 11:6 But without faith it is impossible to please him: for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him.

⁴³¹ Philippians 4:6 - 7 "Be careful for nothing; but in every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God. And the peace of God, which passes all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus."

⁴³² 1 Peter 2:20 - 23 "... what glory is it, if, when ye be buffeted for your faults, ye shall take it patiently? But if, when ye do well, and suffer for it, ye take it patiently, this is acceptable with God. For even hereunto were ye called: because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that ye should follow his steps: Who did no sin, neither was guile found in his mouth: Who, when he was reviled, reviled not again; when he suffered, he threatened not; but committed himself to him that judgeth righteously:"

cannot find peace in verbal strife.⁴³³ The wrath of man does not work the righteousness of God.⁴³⁴ We cannot find comfort in affliction apart from remembering God's judgments and trusting Him to do for us what we cannot do for ourselves. To answer the self-willed in our own will is to become like them. To silently wait for the LORD to "remember" his word to us, is to overcome evil with good.⁴³⁵

We may better understand the importance of what the psalmist is really telling us, if we look at ourselves as pilgrims on a journey and the mind as a container of limited volume. If such were our case (and spiritually it is!); we do well to consider the following problem. Seeing that I am going into a wilderness where places to obtain the necessities of life are few and far between, and that I have a very limited capacity for storing and transporting those necessities, what shall I put in my storage jar? The psalmist is telling us that he has filled the storage jar of his mind with the remembrance of God's judgments, not the memories of godless mockers. He has chosen to think about the ancient judgments of God not about the mockeries of evil men. What we think about continually greatly affects what we do. Because the psalmist has "remembered thy judgments of old", he has not "not declined from thy law" like the proud have had him greatly in derision. In choosing to stay focused on God, he has avoided becoming like the very people that he takes such passionate umbrage to. Remembrance brings not only hope, revival, and comfort. It also brings freedom and peace.

Righteous Indignation

⁵³ Horror hath taken hold upon me
Because of the wicked that forsake thy law.



The first word that we encounter in this verse is the word horror. The term translated "horror" is זלעפה (pronounced zal-aw-faw') meaning a glow of wind or anger; also a consuming famine. It comes from זעף (pronounced zaw-af') which is a primitive root meaning, properly, to boil up. This root word calls to mind a figurative use of boiling that we are familiar with: a boiling or a seething anger. But the word also has the overtone the overwhelming sense of the awfulness of a situation (as in the case of a 'horrible' famine that will cost the lives of thousands). There is the additional element of fear that we normally associate with the word horror. A horror movie, for instance, is

⁴³³ 2 Titus 2:24 - 26 "And the servant of the Lord must not strive; but be gentle unto all men, apt to teach, patient, in meekness instructing those that oppose themselves; if God peradventure will give them repentance to the acknowledging of the truth; and that they may recover themselves out of the snare of the devil, who are taken captive by him at his will."

⁴³⁴ James 1:19 - 20 "Wherefore, my beloved brethren, let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath: for the wrath of man worketh not the righteousness of God."

⁴³⁵ Romans 12:19 - 21 "Dearly beloved, avenge not yourselves, but rather give place unto wrath: for it is written, Vengeance is mine; I will repay, saith the Lord. Therefore if thine enemy hunger, feed him; if he thirst, give him drink: for in so doing thou shalt heap coals of fire on his head. Be not overcome of evil, but overcome evil with good."

designed to evoke fear in the beholder. Here, the psalmist experiences a kind of fear, not of the wicked that mock him, but of the firestorm of rage he finds in his own bosom: an all-consuming, overwhelming, and fearsome emotional response. This rage is not because of the mockery of the wicked against him, but because of their contempt of the LORD and their rejection of His righteous governance. The verse strikes a new note. Heretofore, the psalmist has wisely rejected filling his mind with thoughts of self-justification, keeping his attention focused on the LORD's governance and His judgments of old. But choosing to stay focused on God rather than men, does not equate to ignoring their lawless spirit. The psalmist is not turning away his gaze from them, only his heart. The self-willed behavior of the proud who deride him, far from enticing him from to jump through their hoops to win their favor, only infuriates him. We see something of Jesus' experience here with the religious figures of His day. "But whereunto shall I liken this generation? It is like unto children sitting in the markets, and calling unto their fellows, and saying, 'We have piped unto you, and ye have not danced; we have mourned unto you, and ye have not lamented.'" ⁴³⁶ In other words, we have changed our behavior time and again to manipulate you. We have adjusted our behavior one way and another and still we can't make you do what we want you to do. In the mockery of the psalmist we find the nascent implication that if you join us, we will stop making fun of you. Clearly it didn't work. It didn't in the psalmist's case. It didn't in Jesus' case. And it shouldn't in our case either. Instead their behavior has only enraged him by their open rebellion against the God Whom he loved, served, and was intensely loyal to. But such a strong emotion, even though originating in a deep love of God is still painful. To see their insolent rebellion against the God Whom he serves is not pleasant. Not only is there rage against the wicked but grief at the insult they offer to a supremely patient and loving God. The psalmist is suffering not just from mockery against himself (that he can bear) but from grief for the unjust vilification of the One whom he loves!

But righteous indignation, which is the spiritual condition that this verse describes, has in it a real spiritual danger. There is the possibility that the sufferer will cross the fine line between a good desire for justice and the legitimate redress of grievance, and trespasses into the domain of vengeance. The Apostle Paul warns the Christians, "Dearly beloved, avenge not yourselves, but rather give place unto wrath: for it is written, Vengeance is mine; I will repay, saith the Lord."⁴³⁷ What then does it mean: "Give place unto wrath"? Both the mockery of which the psalmist takes slight account and the defamation of God at which he takes great offense are two halves of the same experience – suffering for righteousness sake. The wicked not only mock the psalmist

⁴³⁶ Matthew 11:16 – 17

⁴³⁷ Romans 12:19-21 "Dearly beloved, avenge not yourselves, but rather give place unto wrath: for it is written, Vengeance is mine; I will repay, saith the Lord. Therefore if thine enemy hunger, feed him; if he thirst, give him drink: for in so doing thou shalt heap coals of fire on his head. Be not overcome of evil, but overcome evil with good."

but impugn God. He has done well to not decline from God's law and to remember God's judgments of old as his comfort. But now he must deal with the firestorm of anger at the wicked. Wrath has a place in Christian experience because there is a place for the suffering it entails in God's economy. The trial of suffering can teach patience with the timing of God's providential care of those who serve Him. "...What glory is it, if, when ye be buffeted for your faults, ye shall take it patiently? But if, when ye do well, and suffer for it, ye take it patiently, this is acceptable with God."⁴³⁸ Jesus goes even farther. "Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake. Rejoice, and be exceeding glad: for great is your reward in heaven: for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you."⁴³⁹

God is patient with the wicked that have aroused such a "horror" in the psalmist's heart, because He is not willing to exercise the sword († zain) of judgment just yet. He is supremely patient with the wicked and froward, not because He approves of their actions but because He loves those who just now hate Him and is unwilling to cut them off – at the present time.⁴⁴⁰ And this apparent 'delay' of God is a real trial for those who love Him. "How long," cry the martyrs by the alter of God "dost thou not judge and avenge our blood on them that dwell on the earth"⁴⁴¹ The challenge for all those who feel the keen edge of what the psalmist here suffers is to take heart that not only are they being given a chance to demonstrate their love of God, but also a chance to grow in that love:⁴⁴² to love as God does; not only the good and righteous but also those oppose themselves.⁴⁴³

"The Son of man is come, not to destroy men's lives, but to save: be of the same spirit. When he was reviled, he reviled not again. It is the part of a noble mind to bear up under unmerited disgrace; little minds are litigious and quarrelsome."

Adam Clarke (on Romans 12:19)

⁴³⁸ 1 Peter 2:20

⁴³⁹ Matthew 5:11

⁴⁴⁰ 2 Peter 3:8 – 9 But, beloved, be not ignorant of this one thing, that one day is with the Lord as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day. The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness; but is longsuffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance.

⁴⁴¹ Revelation 6:9 - 11 And when he had opened the fifth seal, I saw under the altar the souls of them that were slain for the word of God, and for the testimony which they held: And they cried with a loud voice, saying, How long, O Lord, holy and true, dost thou not judge and avenge our blood on them that dwell on the earth? And white robes were given unto every one of them; and it was said unto them, that they should rest yet for a little season, until their fellow servants also and their brethren, that should be killed as they were, should be fulfilled.

⁴⁴² Romans 5:2 – 5 "By whom also we have access by faith into this grace wherein we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God. And not only so, but we glory in tribulations also: knowing that tribulation worketh patience; and patience, experience; and experience, hope: and hope maketh not ashamed; because the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost which is given unto us."

⁴⁴³ 2 Timothy 2:25 In meekness instructing those that oppose themselves; if God peradventure will give them repentance to the acknowledging of the truth;

Songs in the Night

⁵⁴ Thy statutes have been my songs
In the house of my pilgrimage.

⁵⁵ I have remembered thy name, O LORD,
In the night, and have kept thy law.



Apart from the several references to God's communication common to all the octaves of this psalm (thy word, thy law, thy judgments, thy statutes, thy precepts), this octave revolves around three interrelated themes: affliction, remembrance, and comfort. "The word ... is my comfort in my affliction." (49a-50a) The psalmist begins with the plea to God that He, "Remember the word unto thy servant, upon which thou hast caused me to hope." (49) The psalmist goes on to say that he has remembered God's judgments of old (52a) and God's name (55a). In verses 54 and 55, the psalmist tells us both the place (54) and time (55) of his observances. One might wonder just what the psalmist means when he tells God (and us) that "Thy statutes have been my songs in the house of my pilgrimage." We tend to associate singing with hymns whose spoken content is largely poetic: lines that scan and rhyme but that also convey a spiritual message. Clearly the psalms have long been recognized as Israel's ancient hymnbook. But the psalmist is not saying here that he has sung psalms, rather statutes. It is most likely that what the psalmist meant is what is still found in synagogue practice today, not the speaking of the Torah, but the precise intoning of it, not unlike the Gregorian chant found in Christendom today. The intoning of the scriptures has the advantage of prolonging and purifying the normal tones found in spoken language. In a large acoustic space, without artificial amplification, intoning makes for much clearer communication. It also makes the word thus presented much more memorable and facilitates reflection on the spoken word by reason of the slowness required for intonation. Chanting also requires much more mental attention than just speaking and therefore further facilitates meditation and spiritual absorption. In short by chanting or intoning the Torah statutes to himself, the psalmist is giving us an insight into just how he has remembered God's word.

This naturally leads us to ask just where is all this happening? We begin to think in terms of a locale, of geography. When the psalmist refers to a house we can easily picture a building where he happens to be. But that is not the picture that the psalmist wants to convey, so he adds the little phrase "of my pilgrimage." Pilgrimage involves travel, and the only house suitable for pilgrimage in the psalmist's day was a tent.⁴⁴⁴ In

⁴⁴⁴ The life of Abraham was marked by his dwelling in tents as a stranger and pilgrim (Hebrews 11:8 – 10). In Jeremiah we find the interesting story of the Rechabites whose patriarch had forbidden his progeny from building houses. Jeremiah tells us how he tested the resolve of their obedience: "And I set before the sons of the house of the Rechabites pots full of wine, and cups, and I said unto them, Drink ye wine. But they said, We will drink no wine: for Jonadab the son of Rechab our father commanded us, saying, Ye shall drink no wine, neither ye, nor your sons for ever: Neither shall ye build house, nor sow seed, nor plant vineyard, nor have any: but all your days ye shall dwell in tents; that ye may live many days in the land where ye be strangers. Thus have we obeyed the

scripture, a tent (commonly referred to as a tabernacle) with its animal skins and bonelike framework is a metaphor for the human body.⁴⁴⁵ In verse 54, the psalmist tells us that he has continually intoned God's statutes to himself to remember, to reflect on, and to observe them as a constant activity of his bodily life regardless of where he happens to be.

In verse 55, the psalmist presents a parallel thought but with the emphasis on time not place. "I have remembered thy name, O LORD, in the night, and have kept thy law." In this verse, however, his use of the temporal phrase "in the night" is unaccompanied by any modifier as was the case of "in the house - of my pilgrimage." Here we might justly assume that his activity of remembrance is strictly nocturnal. And perhaps it is. But the absence of a modifier for the temporal phrase is mildly unsettling. We might show it thus:

"in the house ... of my pilgrimage"
"in the night ... of (what?)"

My own view is that the psalmist has created a tension by means of an incomplete parallelism that bids us search for a modifier that he has purposely omitted. If we examine the threefold theme that this octave presents: Comfort in affliction by means of remembrance of God's word, the only theme that really fits is affliction. The resolution that I propose is:

"in the house ... of my pilgrimage"
"in the night ... of (my affliction)"

Such a view brings us full circle, linking the time of his comforting exercises to the time of his affliction. But these two verses are not describing two unrelated events. As noted, they give us both the time and place of a single ongoing event. They tell us that throughout his earthly pilgrimage the psalmist has been comforting himself by chanting the statutes of God as his songs in the night of his affliction, and thus remembering the Name of the LORD as he encourages himself to keep God's law. The little phrase, "song in the night", does occur in conjunction with physical affliction in Psalm 77:1-3, 6. "In the day of my trouble I sought the Lord: my sore ran in the night, and ceased not: my

voice of Jonadab the son of Rechab our father in all that he hath charged us, to drink no wine all our days, we, our wives, our sons, nor our daughters; Nor to build houses for us to dwell in: neither have we vineyard, nor field, nor seed: But we have dwelt in tents, and have obeyed, and done according to all that Jonadab our father commanded us." Jeremiah 35:5 - 10

⁴⁴⁵ It is telling that the Apostle Paul, who by trade was a tent maker, makes this analogy in regards to the new body that believers will receive at the resurrection from the dead. "For we know that if our earthly house of this tabernacle were dissolved, we have a building of God, a house, not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. For in this we groan, earnestly desiring to be clothed upon with our house which is from heaven: If so be that being clothed we shall not be found naked. For we that are in this tabernacle do groan, being burdened: not for that we would be unclothed, but clothed upon, that mortality might be swallowed up of life." 2 Corinthians 5:1 - 4 The Apostle Peter also uses a similar metaphor for his body. "Yea, I think it meet, as long as I am in this tabernacle, to stir you up by putting you in remembrance; Knowing that shortly I must put off this my tabernacle, even as our Lord Jesus Christ hath showed me. Moreover I will endeavor that ye may be able after my decease to have these things always in remembrance." 2 Peter 1:13 - 15

soul refused to be comforted. I remembered God, and was troubled: I complained, and my spirit was overwhelmed. Selah. ... I call to remembrance my song in the night: I commune with mine own heart: and my spirit made diligent search.” The affliction in Psalm 77 appears to be physical. The affliction in Psalm 119:49-55 is not. It is clearly emotional. Derision, manifest disobedience of the wicked, discouragement, and depression, can all link together to form a dark night for the soul. God’s words, spoken in the past, are the only comfort available as remembrance, meditation, and faith become the handmaidens for the soul’s love for God which continues to grow amidst a darkness made more difficult by God’s seeming absence and inactivity. There is scriptural evidence that such a trying journey into the unknown (in which the individual risks everything on God’s faithfulness to His promises) is the very essence of pilgrimage, the soul’s journey into blessed communion with the Transcendent Creator.

“By faith Abraham, when he was called to go out into a place which he should after receive for an inheritance, obeyed; and he went out, not knowing whither he went. By faith he sojourned in the land of promise, as in a strange country, dwelling in tabernacles with Isaac and Jacob, the heirs with him of the same promise: For he looked for a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God.”⁴⁴⁶

Faith and Repentance

- ⁵¹ The proud have had me greatly in derision:
Yet have I not declined from thy law.
- ⁵² I remembered thy judgments of old, O LORD;
And have comforted myself.
- ⁵³ Horror hath taken hold upon me
Because of the wicked that forsake thy law.
- ⁵⁴ Thy statutes have been my songs
In the house of my pilgrimage.
- ⁵⁵ I have remembered thy name, O LORD,
In the night, and have kept thy law.



- ⁵⁶ This I had,
Because I kept thy precepts.



At first glance, the word “this” makes Verse 56 is ambiguous. It may be that the verse is a classic assertion of cause and effect: **this** effect has happened **because** of that

⁴⁴⁶ Hebrews 11:8 - 10

cause.⁴⁴⁷ Or it may be that the word “this” simply refers forward: **this** is my case which I have been presenting it to you, namely **that** I have been keeping your orders.⁴⁴⁸ In either case, the verse is a summary. We still have the problem of teasing out what the verse refers back to. We might choose a narrow view of the ellipsis and conclude that verse 56 summarizes back no further than verse 55: I remembered your name and kept your law because I kept your precepts. Such a view is doubtless valid. But we have no reason to believe that it looks back only to verse 55 when verse 55 is so like the other four before it. I would appear that verse 56 is a summary of all that has gone before, with reference to both God (His law, His statutes, His judgments, and His name) and to the proud rebels who mocked the psalmist and forsook the Law of God. This state of affairs becomes the experiential possession of the psalmist because of he has kept God’s precepts. But what does it mean to keep God’s precepts? We can understand not declining (51b) but keeping the law of God (55b) in terms of actual obedience. We can understand the remembrance of God’s ancient judgments (52a) and His name in the night of affliction (55- i.e. His love, goodness, fidelity, wisdom, power, presence, etc.). We can understand the comfort (52b, 54) of remembering and chanting to ourselves the first principles of the spiritual life in those times that try our souls. But what does it mean to keep God’s precepts? Its presence in this summary verse, suggests its priority in the spiritual life. All else happens because of (as Jerome) or in summary of (as Goldingay) keeping God’s precepts.

When God would reverse the terrible effects of sin in the life, He offers a gracious invitation to the prophet Isaiah. “Come now, and let us reason together, saith the LORD: though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool.”⁴⁴⁹ The invitation is remarkable in that God in His immanent and immutable transcendence, makes a *bona fide* offer, not just to the prophet, but through him to all those evil doers whose noxious behavior before His eyes is as observable “as scarlet”. He invites the peccable, finite, and enslaved sinner to come to Him and “reason” with Him. For a finite, flawed creature to “reason” with immutable omniscience is not an invitation to rehearse a multitude of excuses for unacceptable and damnable behavior. God is not going to change His mind! But the sinner just might. The darkness of the constant ignorance of God’s law, His ancient judgments, and His statutes that bear on every issue in life, might just be overcome by the light of His presence! Overcome providing “ye be willing and obedient.” God does not manipulate

⁴⁴⁷ So Jerome

⁴⁴⁸ So Goldingay “**This** is how it has been for me,

That I have observed your orders”

⁴⁴⁹ Isaiah 1:16 - 20 “Wash you, make you clean; put away the evil of your doings from before mine eyes; cease to do evil; Learn to do well; seek judgment, relieve the oppressed, judge the fatherless, plead for the widow. Come now, and let us reason together, saith the LORD: though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool. If ye be willing and obedient, ye shall eat the good of the land: But if ye refuse and rebel, ye shall be devoured with the sword: for the mouth of the LORD hath spoken it.”

or force. He reasons with us of sin, righteousness, and judgment († the sword).⁴⁵⁰ And perchance it is we who will have a change of mind,⁴⁵¹ before the sword of judgment does its work. When we experience such a change of mind, everything changes. The way we feel (comfort (52b, 54a), horror (53a)), the way we think (remembrance (52a, 55a), cognition (56b)), the way we act (obedience (51b, 55b)), and our experiences in relationships (mockery (51a), and alienation (53)). The way we learn to think alters the way we live and experience life. It is this that the psalmist is telling us when he says all that has gone before in this octave is in consequence of or is summarized by the way he has learned to think and that is the way that God has explained and desired us to think when He gave us His precepts. While human thought may be only an adumbration of Divine cognition, its rectitude is nevertheless central to any human relationship with God that is going to be supremely happy. God has promised that if ‘the wicked forsakes his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts: and returns unto the LORD, then he will have mercy upon him; for God will abundantly pardon.’⁴⁵² In the end “this” is not solely about what the psalmist thinks, feels, or does. It is about believing that God is willing to reason with him (i.e. His precepts), about being persuaded by that dialogue (i.e. keeping His precepts) and finally about being rightly related to the God he loves (i.e. This I had). God invites not only the psalmist but all of us to learn how to think from discoursing with Him. But we must believe His invitation to “reason together” is real⁴⁵³ before we enter into the blessed, mind changing exercise which it offers. And all this is made possible by reason of God’s great mercy, which is good news indeed.

⁴⁵⁰ John 16:7 – 11 Nevertheless I tell you the truth; It is expedient for you that I go away: for if I go not away, the Comforter will not come unto you; but if I depart, I will send him unto you. And when he is come, he will reprove the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment: Of sin, because they believe not on me; Of righteousness, because I go to my Father, and ye see me no more; Of judgment, because the prince of this world is judged.

⁴⁵¹ Matthew 3:1-2 “In those days came John the Baptist, preaching in the wilderness of Judaea, and saying, Repent ye: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.” {“repent” - μετανοεω (met-an-o-eh'-o) to think differently or afterwards, i.e. reconsider (morally, feel compunction)}

⁴⁵² Isaiah 55:7-9 “Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts: and let him return unto the LORD, and he will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon. For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith the LORD. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts.”

⁴⁵³ Hebrews 11:6 “But without faith it is impossible to please him: for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him.”

Π (CHETH)

☞ The Psalmist's Relationship with God ☛

⁵⁷ Thou art my portion, O LORD:
I have said that I would keep thy words.
⁵⁸ I entreated thy favor with my whole heart:
Be merciful unto me according to thy word.
⁵⁹ I thought on my ways,
And turned my feet unto thy testimonies
⁶⁰ I made haste,
And delayed not to keep thy commandments

☞ The Psalmist's Relationship with the World ☛

⁶¹ The bands of the wicked have robbed me:
But I have not forgotten thy law.
⁶² At midnight I will rise to give thanks unto thee
Because of thy righteous judgments
⁶³ I am a companion of all them that fear thee,
And of them that keep thy precepts.
⁶⁴ The earth, O LORD, is full of thy mercy:
Teach me thy statutes.



Π – **Cheth** means a fence. Why does a person erect a fence? One reason we erect fences is to protect what is inside of the fence from what is outside of it (your garden from the deer or your sheep from wolves) or vice versa (as to protect people from dangerous zoo animals). A fence, then suggests separation and protection. It also represents the expression of ownership or dominion. We typically put fences around our property to let our neighbors know just where our property begins and not to encroach on it. Sometimes dominion and liability for safety go hand in hand, as in the case of fences erected around construction sites to prevent the general public from entering the site and being hurt. Sometimes a fence can imprison, as people in a prison camp or animals in a zoo. A fence can separate from, cut off, protect, or imprison depending on the intent of the one erecting it. As in the meanings of the other letters, it is the concept behind the word that is important. For example, sin can be seen as a kind of fence that we (or Satan or both) have erected between us and God – to keep Him out of our lives and God out of Satan's earthly domain. Sin imprisons the soul. But sin is a very poor fence when it comes to an omnipresent and omnipotent God who loves us and will not allow a fallen creature like Satan to separate us from Him!⁴⁵⁴

⁴⁵⁴ Romans 8:31 - 39 "What shall we then say to these things? If God be for us, who can be against us? He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things? Who shall lay any thing to the charge

A fence is also parabolic for God's providential care. Satan complained that he could not get at Job because the LORD had erected a hedge around him.⁴⁵⁵ Jesus' parables about Israel as a choice vineyard makes reference to the surrounding fence or hedge⁴⁵⁶ that symbolizes God's ceaseless providential care for their safety and wellbeing.

But how does the symbol of a fence help us to understand this octave? All of the words that we have been pondering so far (Commandments, statutes, precepts, testimonies, judgments, the law in general and all of God's word) set boundaries. One of the most common ways to describe sin is as a trespass, a going past a boundary or fence that tells us not to go there. If a person goes past a construction site fence, for example, they can be arrested for trespassing. The concept of a fence throws light on all seven of the terms used in this section. Why does God speak his words to us? Clearly His intent is to protect us and to provide for our eternal well-being. That is the general sense but, as we noted initially, each of the words used has a slightly different meaning. Notice the several actions of the psalmist. All may be seen as his continued desire to stay within the bounds set by God's word.

The structure of this octave surrounds two prayers, one for mercy (58b) and one for instruction (64b). Although different, the prayers are linked in that they both address God's mercy in relation to His communication (His word (58b) and His statutes (64b)). The first prayer asks for mercy "according to thy word", and the second prayer asks for instruction in the statutes because "the earth, O LORD, is full of thy mercy." The prayers are also linked in that the second, asking for instruction, follows logically from the first asking for mercy; the corrective instruction of God being a practical expression of His mercy. The first plea for mercy relates the four verses that surround it. And the second prayer unifies the four verses that precede it.

The first prayer: What is it that leads us to ask God for His mercy? Our first response might be our failure. But that is not what is foremost in the psalmist's thinking. Instead the basis for his plea for mercy is "according to thy word," presumably God's spoken

of God's elect? It is God that justifieth. Who is he that condemneth? It is Christ that died, yea rather, that is risen again, who is even at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us. Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? As it is written, 'For thy sake we are killed all the day long; we are accounted as sheep for the slaughter.' Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him that loved us. For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord." One has the sense that the apostle is saying that there is nothing that can provide an adequate fence that can separate us from the love of God shown in our Lord Jesus Christ.

⁴⁵⁵ Job 1:8 - 11 And the LORD said unto Satan, "Hast thou considered my servant Job, that there is none like him in the earth, a perfect and an upright man, one that fears God, and escheweth evil?" Then Satan answered the LORD, and said, "Does Job fear God for naught? Hast not thou made a hedge about him, and about his house, and about all that he hath on every side? Thou hast blessed the work of his hands, and his substance is increased in the land. But put forth thine hand now, and touch all that he hath, and he will curse thee to thy face."

⁴⁵⁶ Mark 12:1 "... A certain man planted a vineyard, and set a hedge about it, and digged a place for the wine vat, and built a tower, and let it out to husbandmen, and went into a far country."

promise. In other words, the fidelity of God, not the infidelity of the psalmist, is at stage center here. All that the psalmist says revolves around that central assertion of God's fidelity. First there is the psalmist's decision that he will be satisfied with God and not seek elsewhere for gratification of human appetite. It is the central assertion of contentment: 'God, you are my portion, my inheritance and fellowship with you will mark the boundaries of my life.'⁴⁵⁷ In the light of this, the psalmist makes two subsequent statements about his intention to keep God's words⁴⁵⁸ and his heart felt effort.⁴⁵⁹ What he, in effect, is saying in verse 58 is that I have made a whole-hearted effort to entreat your favor in our relationship by keeping your words, but despite my best efforts, at times I have transgressed your boundaries. Therefore, I need the mercy of your forgiveness. But mercy asked for, and received is not a closed case. The psalmist (who essentially omits to describe the specifics of his failure) goes on to describe his subsequent actions. "I thought on my ways" (reflection or learning the lessons of failure) and "turned my feet unto thy testimonies" (repentance). That is: I realized how and why my ways went beyond the bounds you set and have determined to live by the truth of your testimony. Nor was his response delayed. He made haste (and delayed not) "to keep thy commandments." The resolve to live within the bounds set by the great commandments must be put into effect before old habits return. What this last tells us is very important to our understanding of the spiritual life. The urgency with which the psalmist redirects his steps springs from the same whole-hearted desire he had to seek a favorable relationship with God in the first place. Regardless of success or failure, the direction of the psalmist's heart has not changed. This is important, because it is not conformity with external constraints that motivates the psalmist, but the obedience of a loving heart. And in this we gain insight not into God's word as π – cheth, a fence, but the psalmist's heart attitude to the limitations that God articulates for the psalmist's welfare.

The second prayer: The structure of this second part of the octave is interesting in that everything comes before the actual prayer. The view of the psalmist is different as well. In the first prayer, the view was wholly internal. It is just the LORD and the psalmist. In the second prayer, the view is wholly external beginning with "the bands of the wicked (that) have robbed me." Here we see the psalmist's intention to resist the temptations of the wicked that would have him transgress the boundaries God has appointed. What he is saying, in effect is that, my old acquaintances call to me from beyond lawful limits you have set. Their fellowship has robbed me of fellowship with you in the past, but now I will not transgress with them. He turns instead to his present companions: "all them that fear thee, and of them that keep thy precepts." The psalmist clearly

⁴⁵⁷ We have a more extensive development of this theme in Psalm 16:5 & 6 "The LORD is the portion of mine inheritance and of my cup: thou maintainest my lot. The lines are fallen unto me in pleasant places; yea, I have a goodly heritage."

⁴⁵⁸ "I have said that I would keep thy words" i.e. I will stay within the bounds that your words have set for me.

⁴⁵⁹ "I entreated thy favor with my whole heart Be merciful unto me according to thy word."

understands Paul's warning to the Corinthians, "Do not deceive yourselves: "Evil companionships corrupt good morals."⁴⁶⁰ But how did he come to such a decision? Verse 62 gives us a hint. In this verse we have joy in gloom. "At midnight I will rise to give thanks unto thee because of thy righteous judgments." That is, when things look most black, and I am downcast, I will remember what you have taught me about the godly life and sing songs to you; songs... in the night. ⁴⁶¹ It is sometimes the times alone when things are very dark that we find the light necessary to make critical and life changing decisions about who our life companions are going to be: the bands of the wicked or them that fear thee and keep thy precepts (i.e. the blessed). What choice is his? Those without your fence tempted me to transgress, but my song awoke me to the reality that there were many with me who fear thee, and who think the way you have taught us to (i.e. that keep your precepts⁴⁶²). We are safe and happy within the bounds that you have set for "Thou art my portion, O LORD." Having made this choice the psalmist pleads to be instructed in the true nature of those boundaries within which true blessedness is possible: "Teach me thy statutes."

But there is one last great realization in this section that is important for all mentioned. The psalmist has surveyed the whole of the spiritual world around him; those inside the fence of God's word, and those outside of it. And just as we saw that what was important for the psalmist whether abiding inside the providential limits of God's wisdom or momentarily straying past those limits, was that his heart was still right towards God; so here we see that the love of God is not bounded by the boundaries that His word sets. "The earth, O LORD, is full of thy mercy." The psalmist is telling us what Jesus says with such eloquence in His sermon on the mount.

"Ye have heard that it hath been said, Thou shalt love thy neighbor, and hate thine enemy. But I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you; that ye may be the children of your Father which is in heaven: for he makes his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust. For if ye love them which love you, what reward have ye? Do not even the publicans the same? And if ye

⁴⁶⁰ 1 Corinthians 15:33 (Weymouth translation)

⁴⁶¹ Acts 16:22-26 "And the multitude rose up together against them: and the magistrates rent off their clothes, and commanded to beat them. And when they had laid many stripes upon them, they cast them into prison, charging the jailor to keep them safely: Who, having received such a charge, thrust them into the inner prison, and made their feet fast in the stocks. And at midnight Paul and Silas prayed, and sang praises unto God: and the prisoners heard them. And suddenly there was a great earthquake, so that the foundations of the prison were shaken: and immediately all the doors were opened, and every one's bands were loosed." We should not underestimate the power of hymnody to both give us fresh courage in dark and discouraging situations, nor the power such spiritual songs have both to set us free from the shackles of doubt or despair and to bring deliverance to other persons imprisoned by sin. If the psalmist lamented his old sinful acquaintances; after his songs ... in the night, he finds that he has a very different set of friends and companions.

⁴⁶² Psalm 119:4 Thou hast commanded us to keep thy precepts diligently.

*salute your brethren only, what do you more than others? Do not even the publicans so?
Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect.”* ⁴⁶³

Taken together, the possibility of a heart being right toward God and God’s ever-present love both inside or outside the fence of His word, would suggest that in ן - cheth, the fence of God’s word has a ך - daleth, a door for access into fellowship with God.⁴⁶⁴

Contentment

⁵⁷ Thou art my portion, O LORD:

I have said that I would keep thy words.



This octave is ן (cheth). Cheth means a fence. Fences serve many purposes both for concentration and protection of livestock, for safety, and to mark property boundaries. For ancient Israel, as an ancient agrarian society, property was important as a means of livelihood and sustenance. For a farmer who lives off what he can grow, his fields (and the weather) are his life. The essence of God’s covenant with the nation of Israel took account of this reality. It was essentially threefold: 1) I am your God; 2) You are my people (you will have no gods before me); and 3) this is your land. The three parts were interrelated. If Israel did their part, God would be faithful to do His. When Israel failed, God would make His displeasure known by drought and famine in the land.⁴⁶⁵ Unlike Egypt, which relied on its river, Israel depended on the rain of Heaven.

It is important to note that the inheritance boundaries of each tribe were appointed of God. Not everyone inherited a plot of land in Canaan, however. The Levites were given cities for their inheritance and suburbs but not large land holdings as a tribe.⁴⁶⁶ They were not intended to be primarily farmers. Scattered among the tribes, they were to serve the LORD in the tabernacle. As such He was referred to as their inheritance. And

⁴⁶³ Matthew 5:43 - 48

⁴⁶⁴ John 10:7-9 Then said Jesus unto them again, Verily, verily, I say unto you, I am the door of the sheep. All that ever came before me are thieves and robbers: but the sheep did not hear them. I am the door: by me if any man enter in, he shall be saved, and shall go in and out, and find pasture.

⁴⁶⁵ Deuteronomy 11:13-17 And it shall come to pass, if ye shall hearken diligently unto my commandments which I command you this day, to love the LORD your God, and to serve him with all your heart and with all your soul, that I will give you the rain of your land in his due season, the first rain and the latter rain, that thou mayest gather in thy corn, and thy wine, and thine oil. And I will send grass in thy fields for thy cattle, that thou mayest eat and be full. Take heed to yourselves, that your heart be not deceived, and ye turn aside, and serve other gods, and worship them; And then the LORD’S wrath be kindled against you, and he shut up the heaven, that there be no rain, and that the land yield not her fruit; and lest ye perish quickly from off the good land which the LORD giveth you.

⁴⁶⁶ Numbers 35:2 -4 “Command the children of Israel, that they give unto the Levites of the inheritance of their possession cities to dwell in; and ye shall give also unto the Levites suburbs for the cities round about them. And the cities shall they have to dwell in; and the suburbs of them shall be for their cattle, and for their goods, and for all their beasts. And the suburbs of the cities, which ye shall give unto the Levites, shall reach from the wall of the city and outward a thousand cubits round about.”

the rest of Israel was to contribute to their support through a system of tithing.⁴⁶⁷ We find an echo of this language in Psalm 16 where the psalmist says, “The LORD is the portion of mine inheritance and of my cup: thou maintainest my lot. The lines are fallen unto me in pleasant places; yea, I have a goodly heritage.”⁴⁶⁸ The reference to “portion” in verse 57a is a reference to the portion of one’s inheritance. When the psalmist says, “Thou art my portion, O LORD”, he is using the language of inheritance as a metaphor not for possession but for the enjoyment of a relationship with the LORD in much the same way that a farmer might enjoy his inheritance of good farmland by farming it. When a farmer has a “goodly heritage” his concern will be not only to improve the property, but to mark its boundaries as a means of its preservation for himself and for his heirs. Today farmers often mark the boundaries of their lots with a fence. But, in a day when economics made extensive fences prohibitive, the farmer relied on markers at the corners of property lines and the words which described those boundaries as his “fence.” These markers, left generation after generation, were ancient but important and must not be moved. “Remove not the ancient landmark, which thy fathers have set.”⁴⁶⁹ This use of law to establish title to land holdings which are described verbally based on geographic markers gives rise to the notion of the law as a fence (פּ חֶתֶם). The word of the law, written down in title deeds, becomes the fence. And words are a fence not just for material holdings, but also for immaterial things like relationships. When the psalmist uses the language of inheritance as a metaphor for relationship with God, he recognizes that it is the LORD who has established the boundaries of that relationship with Himself. This explains the promise made in 57b, “I have said that I would keep thy words.” In other words, the psalmist promises not to shift “the ancient landmark” of the boundaries of his relationship with God. What lies behind the psalmist’s promise is very searching of human desire.

There are some people whose appetites for land or wealth or power cannot be satisfied. Paul tells us, “I have learned, in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content.”⁴⁷⁰ But

⁴⁶⁷ Numbers 18:1a, 6-7, 20 - 24 And the LORD said unto Aaron, ... I, behold, I have taken your brethren the Levites from among the children of Israel: to you they are given as a gift for the LORD, to do the service of the tabernacle of the congregation. Therefore thou and thy sons with thee shall keep your priest’s office for every thing of the altar, and within the vail; and ye shall serve: I have given your priest’s office unto you as a service of gift: and the stranger that cometh nigh shall be put to death. ... And the LORD spake unto Aaron, Thou shalt have no inheritance in their land, neither shalt thou have any part among them: I am thy part and thine inheritance among the children of Israel. And, behold, I have given the children of Levi all the tenth in Israel for an inheritance, for their service which they serve, even the service of the tabernacle of the congregation. Neither must the children of Israel henceforth come nigh the tabernacle of the congregation, lest they bear sin, and die. But the Levites shall do the service of the tabernacle of the congregation, and they shall bear their iniquity: it shall be a statute for ever throughout your generations, that among the children of Israel they have no inheritance. But the tithes of the children of Israel, which they offer as an heave offering unto the LORD, I have given to the Levites to inherit: therefore I have said unto them, Among the children of Israel they shall have no inheritance.

⁴⁶⁸ Psalm 16:5-6

⁴⁶⁹ Proverbs 22:28

⁴⁷⁰ Philippians 4:11 -13 Not that I speak in respect of want: for I have learned, in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content. I know both how to be abased, and I know how to abound: every where and in all things I am instructed both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need. I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me.

contentment with their lot is a lesson that the unbelieving have great difficulty learning. The believer heeds the admonition not to covet but to be content. "Let your conversation be without covetousness; and be content with such things as ye have"⁴⁷¹ Instead the unbeliever continually violates the tenth commandment: thou shalt not covet. The real issue lies in the core assertion: "Thou art my portion, O LORD." For the person who can truly say this with contentment, seeking to move the boundaries to include that which is not God is to monstrously devalue the transcendent Person of the Almighty. Contentment, peace, joy, and hope all mark the spiritual state of the person who has rightly valued his relationship with the LORD. Covetousness, turmoil, and fear mark the person who, through unbelief, has sought to move the "ancient markers" of the Decalogue to make space for their own personal idols of wealth, power, and (ultimately) an unsatisfied self on the throne of God within their heart. But that which is not God cannot satisfy. The appetites given to humanity for God are bottomless and suited only for the transcendent One. Only God can satisfy such longings. To attempt to satisfy our inherent appetite for God with created things is to doom ourselves to endless hunger and thirst. Megalomania is a bottomless pit! The psalmist knows full well that God's word is the fence of that protects him from such an awful fall. Therefore he promises to "keep thy words." On the other hand, the apostle Paul warns us, "... We brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out. And having food and raiment let us be therewith content. But they that will be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and hurtful lusts, which drown men in destruction and perdition. For the love of money is the root of all evil: which while some coveted after, they have erred from the faith, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows."⁴⁷²

Seeking God's Face

⁵⁸ I entreated thy favor with my whole heart:
Be merciful unto me according to thy word.



The Hebrew phrase "I entreated thy favor" is literally "I sweetened your face."⁴⁷³ The NIV translates this verse:

"I have sought your face with all my heart;
Be gracious to me according to your promise."

⁴⁷¹ Hebrews 13:5 - 6 Let your conversation be without covetousness; and be content with such things as ye have: for he hath said, I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee. So that we may boldly say, The Lord is my helper, and I will not fear what man shall do unto me.

⁴⁷² 1 Titus 6:7 - 10

⁴⁷³ From Goldingay's translation in Psalms Vol. 3. Page 405

The reference clearly rests upon an awareness of non-verbal communication in which the individual gauges the tenor of a relationship by observing another's visage, without reference to spoken words that communicate an emotional state. We might ask if God's "face" is projecting hostility or anger. Or is it a smile the psalmist "sees"? This notion lies behind the Aaronic blessing: "The LORD bless thee, and keep thee. The LORD make his face shine upon thee, and be gracious unto thee. The LORD lift up his countenance upon thee, and give thee peace."⁴⁷⁴ For a king to lift up his countenance, to look with a smile upon the individual is to reaffirm the king's intent to bless. The human face is capable of a myriad of external non-verbal expressions of the inner emotional state. There is the possibility of emotional neutrality – a state of total relaxation of all facial muscles – which presents an ambiguous communication, the so-called "poker face." This is frequently the manner of representing Jesus' face in Orthodox Icons as an encouragement for the viewer to "sweeten" His face toward themselves. We should not infer, however, that the psalmist believes either that God is angry with him or that He is purely neutral. The Hebrew "I sweetened your face" implies that he knows that God is smiling upon him because in affirming "Thou art my portion, O LORD," and in promising "that I would keep thy words", the psalmist has indeed drawn forth a positive, smiling, or "sweet" face from God.

But why does the psalmist feel he has to do this? The answer lies with the nature of the Divine - human relationship. Many human relationships are quite durable, regardless of individual behavior, as in the case of a father and son. The process of human generation establishes the existence of a relationship is not easily erased by later behavior, good or bad on either part. This is the spring that drives the action of the parable of the Prodigal Son. Regardless of the son's ill-behavior, the father recognized the relationship even when the son was estranged from him. And he felt the necessity to acknowledge the father-son relationship when the repentant son returned. "For this my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found."⁴⁷⁵ But not all relationships are so durable. Even the most intimate relationships may be damaged beyond repair with the persistent misdeeds of one or both parties. Of which type, then, is the Divine-human relationship? The bulk of biblical testimony, not the least of which is the story of the prodigal just cited, tends to encourage us to believe that it is the former, a relationship rooted in an immutable, divine love for us. If that is so, why then should the psalmist ever bother about "seeking the face of God", since the relationship cannot be lost in the first place? That answer lies in whether or not there was a relationship to begin with. The assertion of the preceding verse (57) focused on contentment with God and the psalmist's determination to respect the boundaries of that relationship as defined by God's word. The two-fold statement, "Thou art my portion, O LORD: I have said that I

⁴⁷⁴ Numbers 6:24-27

⁴⁷⁵ Luke 15:24a

would keep thy words," implies his contentment with his lot and a lack of desire to go beyond the *cheth* (ח) or fence of God's word. An inevitable corollary of contentment with a "goodly heritage" is the desire to improve that lot. But, as we noted, in a contented relationship with God there is no room for other 'gods' like money, wealth, praise of men, possessions, etc. beyond God's allotment. In a contented and harmonious relationship with God, there is room only for God, Himself. There is no room for other things. Such a view is absolutely essential seeing that God transcends all else that is not Him. To suffer covetousness to enter a Divine-human relationship is to be discontented with God. To seek to alleviate discontent by elevating that which is not God to the status of God is to monstrously devalue the Person of God to just another thing. Such a state of affairs is not descriptive of a relationship with God gone wrong. It is an indication that the Divine-human relationship never existed in the first place. For all his estrangement from his father, the prodigal (like the father), never lost sight of the existence of that relationship. "When he came to himself, he said, ... I will arise and go to my father" ⁴⁷⁶ But those who say they desire God's favor while courting other things in their discontented covetousness, deceive themselves, believing that they can have 'all this and heaven too.' The words of Jesus to Peter (whom He called to leave his nets and follow Him) are the same to all of us, "Lovest thou me more than these?" ⁴⁷⁷ To borrow from the insight of Martin Buber; ⁴⁷⁸ the only relationship possible with God is "I-Thou." An "I-it" relationship is impossibility. God, as He is, is either first in the life, or He is not there at all. The pre-eminence of God in the psalmist's life is attested to by the phrase "with my whole heart." God, Who looks upon the heart, desires the whole heart seeking His face, undivided with the pursuit of other things.

Given this state of affairs, the hallmark of any harmonious personal relationship with God must include an on-going, central sensitivity to God's affective sensitivities (His "face") and a determination to live one's life continually with that sensitivity in mind (i.e. "to seek His face with all my whole heart"). For example, trust, which is an integral part of loving human relationships, is not given to be possessed like some material artifact. If we are given the trust of another, we must continue to earn that trust by our faithful behavior. In short, all truly harmonious relationships (with God or man) require continual work! Even if the LORD makes his face shine upon the psalmist and is gracious unto him, the psalmist knows that this is not a justification for carelessness in his future actions in relation to God. And he also knows that he needs the grace of God to succeed in maintaining that harmony. Although he has promised to keep God's words and has continually sought God's face, it is only by God's faithful empowerment,

⁴⁷⁶ Luke 15:17-19 And when he came to himself, he said, How many hired servants of my father's have bread enough and to spare, and I perish with hunger! I will arise and go to my father, and will say unto him, Father, I have sinned against heaven, and before thee, and am no more worthy to be called thy son: make me as one of thy hired servants.

⁴⁷⁷ John 21:15-17

⁴⁷⁸ Martin Buber: *Ich und Du*

His grace, that this will be possible. So, he closes this verse with the first prayer of this octave: “be gracious to me according to your promise.” In the final analysis, while contentment may be a hallmark of a harmonious relationship with God, the glory of that relationship rests wholly with God, Himself.

Reflection, Repentance, and Obedience

⁵⁹ I thought on my ways,
And turned my feet unto thy testimonies.

⁶⁰ I made haste,
And delayed not to keep thy commandments.



Throughout this psalm the emphasis has been on establishing and maintaining a harmonious relationship with God. The alphabetic nature of the psalm has allowed the individual octaves to focus on specific aspects of that subject. As we noted in verse 58, the nature of the individual’s relationship with God is exceedingly durable. The scriptures make quite clear that God loved the world of men while they were yet sinners.⁴⁷⁹ Although that relationship, once established, cannot be utterly destroyed by subsequent bad behavior, nevertheless the psalmist cannot afford to be careless about God’s affective sensitivities. Even if God makes His face to shine upon him, and is gracious unto him; even if the LORD lifts up his countenance upon him, and gives him peace, there is no excuse for the psalmist to fail to constantly seek God’s face with his whole heart. Honest motivation for God’s sensibilities is not enough, however, as these verses tell us. Actions speak more volubly than words. In what then does this seeking God’s face consist? While verse 57b tells us of his words (“I have said that I would keep thy words”), verses 59 and 60 tell us what the psalmist actually did: Reflection, Repentance, and Obedience. He thought on his ways. He turned his feet to God’s Testimonies. And He kept God’s commandments.

Reflection: The nature of all living human relationships of any kind and particularly that with the Almighty lies in the ability of relationships to change, hopefully for the better. Man, being mutable, the possibility exists that the set point of any human relationship can change. But relational maintenance and especially a change for the better, takes work. It is axiomatic that thought (however subconscious) precedes action. The work of changing the way a relationship operates takes thought about the nature of that relationship. “I thought on my ways.” God warns us that His ways are not our

⁴⁷⁹ John 3:16 - 17 “For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life. For God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through him might be saved.”

Romans 5:8 -10 “But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. Much more then, being now justified by his blood, we shall be saved from wrath through him. For if, when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son; much more, being reconciled, we shall be saved by his life.”

ways. "For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith the LORD. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts."⁴⁸⁰ Does this mean that all such reflection, all such thought on one's ways is useless? Far from it; immediately before making the assertion about the difference between His thought and ways from human thought and ways, God provides an invitation. "Seek ye the LORD while he may be found, call ye upon him while he is near. Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts: and let him return unto the LORD, and he will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon."⁴⁸¹ Even today, when we are confronted with some folly to which we are prone, we tend to ask ourselves "What was I thinking?" If we would mend our way; that which God calls the way of the wicked, we must take account of our, often habituated and semi-conscious thought patterns; that which God calls the 'thoughts of the unrighteous man.'

Repentance: Here פ (cheth - the fence) speaks of the divinely appointed boundaries in that relationship. Relationally, a fence implies not only protection and possession, but also the possibility trespass. Given that all humans have sinned,⁴⁸² trespass is inevitable. It is not enough that the psalmist thinks on his ways. He must also turn his feet unto God's testimonies. He must repent as well as reflect. This repentance is not simply turning back to some inanimate but lawful "way" from an unlawful way. Rather it is a turning back to God, Himself. One can sense that God, Himself is, as it were, calling after the trespasser in His testimony; a testimony that pertains to some specific infraction, some specific trespass. The essence of that call is found in the passage in Isaiah just cited: "let him return unto the LORD." Thus, it is not merely obedience to some abstract set of laws, but rather a return to that communion with God which is central to a harmonious relationship with Him. The psalmist is turning his feet in the direction of the voice that is speaking the testimony of correction, a voice that is behind him.⁴⁸³ And he finds the mercy and grace that he has sought in verse 58b. "...let him return unto the LORD, and he will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon."

Obedience: But turning one's feet unto the testimonies of God (i.e. taking heed to amend one's thoughts and actions in a specific instance of which God's spirit testifies) is not enough. The central feature of any relationship with God involves obedience. The psalmist tells us that he "keeps thy commandments." Mechanical conformity to a set of laws, even though true and just, is not, however, what God is looking for. God looks on

⁴⁸⁰ Isaiah 55:8-9

⁴⁸¹ Isaiah 55:6-7

⁴⁸² Romans 3:23 "For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God..."

⁴⁸³ Isaiah 30:20 - 21 (NIV) "Although the Lord gives you the bread of adversity and the water of affliction, your teachers will be hidden no more; with your own eyes you will see them. Whether you turn to the right or to the left, your ears will hear a voice behind you, saying, 'This is the way; walk in it.'"

the heart not the outward appearance.⁴⁸⁴ As Theophan the Recluse observes “Good clocks work well, but who will say they have life in them?” What is significant in the psalmist’s assertion is not “I kept thy commandments” but rather the celerity of his obedience. “I made haste, and delayed not...”

Here again, the speed of his repentance and subsequent obedience argues the accuracy of his earlier assertion: “I have sought your face with all my heart.” In the end, it is not just the externals of seeking, of reflecting, of repenting, of obeying – as good as these are in themselves – but the heart felt urgency behind all of them that touches the heart of God. It is this urgency that testifies the psalmist has God first in his heart, not second or third behind some hidden idol. He may and does stumble, transgress, not get it right. But God is always first in his heart. And that, after all, is central to any relationship with God that is moving in the direction of harmony and blessedness. The psalmist is quick to appeal to the throne of God and so should we. “Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need.”⁴⁸⁵

Freedom

⁶¹ The bands of the wicked have robbed me:

But I have not forgotten thy law. (KJV)



While the central theme of this psalm is about establishing and maintaining a harmonious relationship with God, it says much about the psalmist’s other relationships (or non-relationships). In this verse, the focus shifts from God to the wicked. The NIV translates this verse, “Though the wicked bind me with ropes, I will not forget your law.” The sense is not just that the wicked, seeing the psalmist’s devotion to God, jealously desire to steal some good that God has bestowed. Rather they have sought to prevent such devotion in the first place, just as a robber ties up his victim in order to prevent their resistance to theft. The verse speaks of the attempt by the wicked to trammel the psalmist’s will, a past operation in which they evidently failed since the psalmist proclaims, “but I have not forgotten thy law.” Any healthy relationship with God is going to result in a pushback from others close to the individual. Jesus warns His followers that “a man’s foes shall be they of his own household.”⁴⁸⁶ The whole-hearted decision to seek God’s face on a continual basis will

⁴⁸⁴ It was such an interior survey of the hearts of Jesse’s sons that resulted in the selection of King David, the man after God’s own heart. “But the LORD said unto Samuel, Look not on his countenance, or on the height of his stature; because I have refused him: for the LORD seeth not as man seeth; for man looketh on the outward appearance, but the LORD looketh on the heart.” 1 Samuel 16:7

⁴⁸⁵ Hebrews 4:16 (NIV)

⁴⁸⁶ Matthew 10:34-37 Think not that I am come to send peace on earth: I came not to send peace, but a sword. For I am come to set a man at variance against his father, and the daughter against her mother, and the daughter in law against her mother in law. And a

result in the disappointment of others around us who secretly (or openly) want us to seek their approval and to conform to their rules. Without knowing it, such behavior stems from a core desire to sit in God's place. The question becomes not merely one of constraint (to bind him with ropes) but of allegiance and ultimately love. The question that Jesus asks Peter remains central to the discussion here, "Lovest thou me more than these?"⁴⁸⁷ Again, as Jesus warns His disciples that their enemies would be those of their own household, He emphasizes that, "He that loveth father or mother more than me is not worthy of me"⁴⁸⁸ This is not to say that all other relationships are nullified by the psalmist's desire to seek God's face, but rather that they have assumed a new dimension. Even so, when Jesus advises that the believer's love for Him must be "more" than their love for their parents, He is not advising against loving one's parents, or anyone else for that matter. The foundation of the Law of God that the psalmist has not forgotten is still to love one's neighbor as one's self.⁴⁸⁹

We should never forget that love, as God intends it, has the ability to constrain the human will. But that constraint⁴⁹⁰ is not equivalent to bondage. The sacrifice of love is not extorted under fear of retribution, nor is it a *quid pro quo* transaction. The sacrifice of love is undertaken as a testimony of the worthiness of the one who is sacrificed for. It is above all a free-will sacrifice. Extorted sacrifices are inevitably bitter because they are not freely given, but constitute a form of robbery. And it is here that we understand what the psalmist is getting at. The wicked didn't want the psalmist to keep to their rules out of love. They wanted him to sacrifice for them out of constraints they sought to place on his will, constraints that would take away his freedom. They sought a "sacrifice" that was constrained through manipulation, not freely given through love. Poor souls, in seeking to occupy God's place in the lives of others, they traded the freedom of being loved as neighbors for the power of being feared and hated as overlords. In seeking power over others, they lost the ability to love and with that their own freedom to love. Seeking to be lords, they became slaves.⁴⁹¹

The assertion of the psalmist is of great spiritual interest to us in a world that still abounds with individuals who suffer from an insatiable desire for power and wealth

man's foes shall be they of his own household. He that loveth father or mother more than me is not worthy of me: and he that loveth son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me.

⁴⁸⁷ John 21:15

⁴⁸⁸ Matthew 10:37 (above)

⁴⁸⁹ Galatians 5:13-14 "... brethren, ye have been called unto liberty; only use not liberty for an occasion to the flesh, but by love serve one another. For all the law is fulfilled in one word, even in this; Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself.

⁴⁹⁰ Paul describes this remarkable motivation to the Corinthian believers as follows: "For whether we be beside ourselves, it is to God: or whether we be sober, it is for your cause. For the love of Christ constraineth us; because we thus judge, that if one died for all, then were all dead: And that he died for all, that they which live should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto him which died for them, and rose again." 2 Corinthians 5:13 - 15

⁴⁹¹ John 8:31 -34 "Then said Jesus to those Jews which believed on him, If ye continue in my word, then are ye my disciples indeed; And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free. They answered him, We be Abraham's seed, and were never in bondage to any man: how sayest thou, Ye shall be made free? Jesus answered them, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Whosoever committeth sin is the servant of sin."

but who fail to see, in their blindness, how wonderful it is to be loved instead of being feared. But this situation in the lives of others need not dissuade us from loving those unlovely souls nor of praying for those who spitefully use us.⁴⁹² Rather, we must realize that even though wicked have tried to bind us with their psychological ropes (for such is the sense of the Hebrew), the loss of our freedom cannot ultimately be affected by others. It is only we ourselves who, succumbing to their temptations, finally give up our freedom. It is ironic in that God, in creating us, made us free to be free, which is another way of saying that in making us free, He made us free to choose to love Him. And when we truly love Him, then His governance is a most welcome liberation not just to love Him, but to love others even though they are unwilling to be loved in truth.

Eureka

⁶² At midnight I will rise to give thanks unto thee
Because of thy righteous judgments.



The scriptures abound in instances of individuals rightly giving praise to God for His many blessings. This verse is certainly among their number. The single word that makes this verse remarkable, however, is the twofold word in the Hebrew **חצות ליל** {chatsowth (the middle of) layil (night)}. Usually people are asleep at midnight. But the psalmist tells the LORD that he “will arise” at that hour to praise Him. Many rightly see in this verse the evidence of the psalmist’s sincerity of devotion. Midnight is a time when the psalmist is alone and there are none to observe his adoration. His praise at such a time reminds us of Jesus’ admonition of secrecy in devotion. “But thou, when thou prayest, enter into thy closet, and when thou hast shut thy door, pray to thy Father which is in secret; and thy Father which seeth in secret shall reward thee openly.”⁴⁹³ It is also quite correct to see in this timing the intensity of the psalmist’s devotion. Sleep is one of the most basic necessities of life. To place such a basic necessity second to the praise of God argues the preeminence of devotion in the psalmist’s life. But the intensity and sincerity revealed by this midnight adoration should not be viewed as the result of an ironclad discipline imposed by a self determination to achieve that which will be acceptable to the Most High. It is not what Paul calls “will-worship”⁴⁹⁴ What the

⁴⁹² Matthew 5:43 - 48 “Ye have heard that it hath been said, Thou shalt love thy neighbor, and hate thine enemy. But I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which spitefully use you, and persecute you; That ye may be the children of your Father which is in heaven: for he maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust. For if ye love them which love you, what reward have ye? do not even the publicans the same? And if ye salute your brethren only, what do ye more than others? do not even the publicans so? Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect.

⁴⁹³ Matthew 6:6

⁴⁹⁴ Colossians 2:20 – 23 “Wherefore if ye be dead with Christ from the rudiments of the world, why, as though living in the world, are ye subject to ordinances, (Touch not; taste not; handle not; which all are to perish with the using;) after the commandments and

psalmist is doing here is in response to the grace of God which he receives at this extraordinary hour with such joy that he is moved to arise and give thanks to God.

But why does this happen at midnight? The three verses preceding this hint at what is going on in the heart of the psalmist. "I thought on my ways. I turned my feet unto thy testimonies. I made haste, and delayed not to keep thy commandments. ... I have not forgotten thy law." The reflection, repentance, and obedience already noted all point to an interior evaluation and direction of the psalmist's life based on his understanding of what God has said: His testimonies, His commandments, His law. They also argue for a persistent and ongoing process of meditation that is not limited to the daylight hours. "But his delight is in the law of the LORD; and in his law doth he meditate day and night."⁴⁹⁵ Besides the direction of the life into a channel of harmonious relationship with God, what is the aim of such meditation? Seeking God's face (58a) involves making coherent sense of all that God has said relative to the various situations of life itself. The psalmist is not so much looking to be a mechanically obedient servant of God as a reasonable one.⁴⁹⁶ In order for his service to be reasonable, he needs to know how God is. His struggle to know is not the manifestation of a resistant and self-determined will bent on challenging God's sovereignty. Rather, it is the unceasing expression of a determined will longing serve God because of Who He is.⁴⁹⁷ To this end, the psalmist's mind grapples with the problem of understanding how all God's sayings apply to the various situations of his life. In his ongoing mental struggle, he knows by faith that if he seeks God, that he will find Him.⁴⁹⁸ He knows that there will be an instant when everything makes sense; when everything comes together like the pieces of a jigsaw puzzle. As midnight is the turning point of the night, so this instant of illumination will be one of many turning points of his life. The term which the psalmist uses to describe this coming together of all that God has said is "thy righteous judgments." This will be the basis of his praise at the turning point. Then the law (both foundational commandment and situational statute) join together with the testimony about the nature of a situation as the sound precepts of jurisprudence integrate all these sayings

doctrines of men? Which things have indeed a shew of wisdom in will worship, and humility, and neglecting of the body; not in any honor to the satisfying of the flesh. Which things have indeed a shew of wisdom in will worship, and humility, and neglecting of the body; not in any honor to the satisfying of the flesh."

In this passage, Paul introduces the term εθελοθρησκεια (pronounced eth-el-oth-race-ki'-ah and translated "will worship") by joining two terms θελω thelo and θρησκεια threskeia, meaning voluntary (arbitrary and unwarranted) piety, i.e. sanctimony or self-willed worship.

⁴⁹⁵ Psalm 1:2

⁴⁹⁶ Romans 12:1 I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service.

⁴⁹⁷ As in the argument for the holiness of His people found in Leviticus 11:44 "For I am the LORD your God: ye shall therefore sanctify yourselves, and ye shall be holy; for I am holy: neither shall ye defile yourselves with any manner of creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth.

⁴⁹⁸ Matthew 7:7-11 Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you: For every one that asketh receiveth; and he that seeketh findeth; and to him that knocketh it shall be opened. Or what man is there of you, whom if his son ask bread, will he give him a stone? Or if he ask a fish, will he give him a serpent? If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your Father which is in heaven give good things to them that ask him?

into a coherent understanding of the whole. That understanding of the whole is embodied in the word “judgment.” But the word judgment does not point to a piece of legal documentation. Rather, it describes the dawning of a light which reveals how everything is. It is the discovery of the truth about life. And, above all, it is the glimpse of the Divine Mind, the One whom the psalmist has been seeking by night upon his bed. “By night on my bed I sought him whom my soul loveth: I sought him, but I found him not. I will rise now ... It was but a little ... but I found him whom my soul loveth: I held him, and would not let him go ...”⁴⁹⁹ Is it any wonder then, that the psalmist, having suddenly found Him whom his soul loves, should spontaneously arise and offer to the LORD thanksgiving and praise for this thrilling manifestation of God’s grace in his life? Where he once slept, he now is totally awake, aware, and rejoicing in the LORD!

Keeping Good Company

⁶³ I am a companion of all them that fear thee,
And of them that keep thy precepts.



While a harmonious relationship with God is central for the psalmist, other relationships are inevitable. Verse 61 mentioned the wicked. “Though the wicked bind me with ropes, ...” (NIV), implying that there were those who tried to trammel the psalmist’s will in a kind of manipulative bondage that didn’t work because he was determined not to forget God’s law. In this verse we have the kind of company that the psalmist wants to keep. “I am a companion of all them that fear thee, and of them that keep thy precepts.” This group is totally different from the wicked; because they fear God,⁵⁰⁰ and they keep God’s precepts (i.e. they order their thoughts according to the will

⁴⁹⁹ Song of Solomon 3:1-4

By night on my bed I sought him whom my soul loveth:
I sought him, but I found him not.
I will rise now, and go about the city in the streets,
and in the broad ways I will seek him whom my soul loveth:
I sought him,
But I found him not.
The watchmen that go about the city found me:
To whom I said, Saw ye him whom my soul loveth?
It was but a little that I passed from them,
But I found him whom my soul loveth:
I held him, and would not let him go,
until I had brought him into my mother's house,
and into the chamber of her that conceived me.

⁵⁰⁰ It is interesting that the one thief of the two crucified with Jesus asks this very question. Both initially railed on Jesus, mocking His title “King of the Jews”. But the one thief, who had initially gone with the crowd in mocking Jesus (Matthew 44:43-44), now becomes aware of the character of the other thief and asks him “Dost not thou fear God, seeing thou art in the same condemnation? And we indeed justly; for we receive the due reward of our deeds: but this man hath done nothing amiss.” (Luke 23:40b-41). Then he sues Jesus for mercy; “Lord, remember me when thou comest into thy kingdom.”

of God). This verse sets before us a most important aspect of the spiritual life – its communal nature.

Solitude: At various times, there are those who seek to be alone with God by retiring from all earthly contact, both good and ill. While such isolation can be beneficial, its dangers can far outweigh the potential benefits.⁵⁰¹ For most believers, solitude should be temporary at most. While verse 61 spoke of alienation from the wicked and verse 63 spoke of companionship with those who fear God; verse 62 presents of a secret communion of praising God in the solitude of midnight. We all need such midnight solitudes when the distractions of daily life subside and the demands of our other relationships are shelved for a while, so that we may truly be alone with God. Even our Lord Jesus found such time necessary.⁵⁰² But we also need neighbors, if only to have people to love as God has told us to.

Companionship: Companionship with godly individuals is a two-way street. The faithful behavior of the psalmist can certainly encourage the humble. “I will praise the name of God with a song, and will magnify him with thanksgiving. ...The humble shall see this, and be glad ...”⁵⁰³ But the psalmist also knows that he needs the company of the godly for their help. We can identify at least three benefits that accrue to the psalmist from his association with the godly: protection, guidance, and encouragement.

Protection: Some are alone not through choice but through accident. The widow and the fatherless are two classes whose lack of a male protector is likened to the state of the solitary. In ancient times, solitary travelers were vulnerable to robbers or accidents as they traveled in a strange land. Such travelers had no family or friend to help them in distress. Widows and the fatherless were similarly prone to such dangers. God, says the psalmist, is to be praised because He sets such vulnerable “solitaries” in families.⁵⁰⁴ The

⁵⁰¹ The peculiar dangers associated with such an eremitic approach to the spiritual life is that it leaves the individual open to a self-directed spirituality and a kind of pride at being a ‘hyper-spiritual’ person to whom everyone appears to be, if not evil then at least, a distraction to their single-minded pursuit of holiness.

⁵⁰² Matthew 14:23 “And when he had sent the multitudes away, he went up into a mountain apart to pray: and when the evening was come, he was there alone.”

⁵⁰³ Psalm 69:30 - 32 I will praise the name of God with a song,
and will magnify him with thanksgiving.
This also shall please the LORD
better than an ox or bullock that hath horns and hoofs.
The humble shall see this, and be glad:
and your heart shall live that seek God.

⁵⁰⁴ Psalm 68:4 - 6 Sing unto God, sing praises to his name:
Extol him that rideth upon the heavens
By his name JAH, and rejoice before him.
A father of the fatherless, and a judge of the widows,
Is God in his holy habitation.
God setteth the solitary in families:
He bringeth out those which are bound with chains:
But the rebellious dwell in a dry land.

role of the family was recognized, then as now, to be a fundamental building block of a safe and secure society.

*“Two are better than one; because they have a good reward for their labor. For if they fall, the one will lift up his fellow: but woe to him that is alone when he falleth; for he hath not another to help him up. Again, if two lie together, then they have heat: but how can one be warm alone? And if one prevails against him, two shall withstand him; and a threefold cord is not quickly broken.”*⁵⁰⁵

Companionship with them that fear God, with those who are well grounded in God’s precepts, can be of great help because they act as a spiritual family in times of danger or distress or when an individual believer experiences a fall.⁵⁰⁶

Guidance: The prophet Jeremiah observes “O LORD, I know that the way of man is not in himself: it is not in man that walketh to direct his steps.”⁵⁰⁷ Bernard of Clairvaux rightly observes that “He who is his own Master is a scholar under a fool.” While the scriptures encourage us to look to God for the direction of our steps,⁵⁰⁸ God often employs individuals in the community of the faithful to provide such direction. The acid test of such spiritual directors is the experiential character of the life they lead with their manifest love for believers, and not just their words.

*“Remember them which have the rule over you, who have spoken unto you the word of God: whose faith follow, considering the end of their conversation: Jesus Christ the same yesterday, and today, and forever. Be not carried about with divers and strange doctrine; for it is a good thing that the heart be established with grace; not with meats, which have not profited them that have been occupied therein. ... Obey them that have the rule over you, and submit yourselves: for they watch for your souls, as they that must give account, that they may do it with joy, and not with grief: for that is unprofitable for you.”*⁵⁰⁹

Encouragement: Elijah felt the keen edge of discouragement. Running away in fear for his life, he complained to God: “the children of Israel have forsaken thy covenant, thrown down thine altars, and slain thy prophets with the sword; and I, even I only, am left; and they seek my life, to take it away.” Adverse events can be very discouraging. Often, we feel all alone at such times. But God gave Elijah several important tasks to do along with the encouragement that he was not alone, that “I have left me seven thousand in Israel, all the knees which have not bowed unto Baal, and every mouth

⁵⁰⁵ Ecclesiastes 4:9-12

⁵⁰⁶ Galatians 6:1 - “Brethren if a man be overtaken in a fault, ye which are spiritual, restore such a one in the spirit of meekness; considering thyself, lest thou also be tempted.”

⁵⁰⁷ Jeremiah 10:23

⁵⁰⁸ Proverbs 3:5 - 6 “Trust in the LORD with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding. In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths.”

⁵⁰⁹ Hebrews 13:7 - 9, 17 where “... the end of their conversation” means considering their manner of life not just the manner of their speech.

which hath not kissed him.”⁵¹⁰ The companionship of “all them that fear thee” is a great spiritual encouragement in times of spiritual trial and danger.

God’s Classroom

⁶³ I am a companion of all them that fear thee,
And of them that keep thy precepts.

⁶⁴ The earth, O LORD, is full of thy mercy:
Teach me thy statutes.



While the last verse encouraged us to consider the benefits of the communal life of “them that fear thee, and of them that keep thy precepts”; this verse allows us to view that community in a startling new light – as students in God’s classroom. The community may provide one another spiritual protection, guidance, and encouragement, but this verse intimates that spiritual education begins and ends with God. This is not to say that members of a true spiritual community centered on God cannot be of service in learning. That is certainly possible, but the type of education that issues in holy obedience is marked by the transformative power of God, not the reformatory power of intellectual comprehension. The psalmist is not looking for illumination but transformation and deliverance thereby.

The Apostle Paul certainly knew the difference. “I find this law at work: When I want to do good, evil is right there with me. For in my inner being I delight in God’s law; but I see another law at work in the members of my body, waging war against the law of my mind and making me a prisoner of the law of sin at work within my members.”⁵¹¹ Paul did not want for education in and a comprehension of what was right. He had completely internalized the law within his conscience.⁵¹² For all his knowledge of right and wrong, however, Paul did not seek further education. He sought deliverance! “What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death?”⁵¹³ In that sense all spiritual education that transforms sinful lives, into lives of willing obedience is the result of God’s grace. The law, as a teacher brings us to Jesus Christ who alone can deliver us from spiritual death with a word. As far as the eye can see, sin abounds. The presence of the law in the form of situation specific statutes only increases our

⁵¹⁰ 1 Kings 19:14-18 “And he (Elijah) said, ‘I have been very jealous for the LORD God of hosts: because the children of Israel have forsaken thy covenant, thrown down thine altars, and slain thy prophets with the sword; and I, even I only, am left; and they seek my life, to take it away.’ And the LORD said unto him, ‘Go, return on thy way to the wilderness of Damascus: and when thou comest, anoint Hazael to be king over Syria: And Jehu the son of Nimshi shalt thou anoint to be king over Israel: and Elisha the son of Shaphat of Abelmeholah shalt thou anoint to be prophet in thy room. And it shall come to pass, that him that escapeth the sword of Hazael shall Jehu slay: and him that escapeth from the sword of Jehu shall Elisha slay. Yet I have left me seven thousand in Israel, all the knees which have not bowed unto Baal, and every mouth which hath not kissed him.’”

⁵¹¹ Romans 7:21 -23 (NIV)

⁵¹² Which explains why, in the passage on law and sin in Romans 7:8-25, Paul uses the personal pronouns “I” and “me” 42 times!

⁵¹³ Romans 7:24 (NIV)

realization of the ubiquity of sin. "The whole world lieth in wickedness."⁵¹⁴ But, as the Apostle Paul reminds us, "But where sin abounded, grace did much more abound."⁵¹⁵ This reality explains why it is necessary for the psalmist to appeal to a specific manifestation of God's grace, His mercy which he finds (fortunately for all of us) in all the earth. "The earth, O LORD, is full of thy mercy."

Certainly, God alone is able to "teach" in such a transformative way making persons willing, obedient, and holy. Just as in a class room, there are posters and examples around the walls for instruction, so too, God is willing to take any student for a "tour" of the boundaries of their relationship with Him. Each statute has a reason. A wise student seeks to understand them. The fact that God is willing to teach should give even the least of people (or the greatest of sinners) hope in His mercy. The first question that God asked a sinning Adam was "Where are you?"⁵¹⁶ No matter where we find ourselves spiritually, the mercy of God is there to rescue us from our lost estate. But God's willingness, ubiquitous and hopeful as it is, is not sufficient. Students only learn when they are willing to learn. That is why verse 64b, with its plea "teach me", is of the utmost importance to all of us.

But education is costly. We might infer that God, infinite in power and wealth, would not require such tuition in His schoolroom. But our sin and failure has caused us a debt to His perfect justice that cannot be dismissed. Who then shall pay for this education that we desperately need but cannot afford? Again, the apostle Paul reminds us that just as through Adam's disobedience we all incurred this debt to God's justice, so too through the obedience of one Person that debt was augmented. "For as by one man's disobedience many were made sinners, so by the obedience of one shall many be made righteous. Moreover, the law entered, that the offence might abound. But where sin abounded, grace did much more abound: That as sin hath reigned unto death, even so might grace reign through righteousness unto eternal life by Jesus Christ our Lord."⁵¹⁷

"Is it a fallen world on which I gaze?
Am I as deeply fallen as the rest?
Yet joys partaking, past my utmost praise,
Instead of wandering forlorn, unblessed?
It is as if an unseen spirit strove
To grave upon my heart, that God is Love!" - Thomas Davis, 1864.

⁵¹⁴ 1 John 5:19 And we know that we are of God, and the whole world lieth in wickedness.

⁵¹⁵ Romans 5:20 - 21 "Moreover the law entered, that the offence might abound. But where sin abounded, grace did much more abound: that as sin hath reigned unto death, even so might grace reign through righteousness unto eternal life by Jesus Christ our Lord."

⁵¹⁶ Genesis 3:8 -9 "And they heard the voice of the LORD God walking in the garden in the cool of the day: and Adam and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the LORD God amongst the trees of the garden. And the LORD God called unto Adam, and said unto him, 'Where art thou?'"

⁵¹⁷ Romans 5:19 - 21

ט TETH

☞ The Psalmist's Relationship with God ☞

- ⁶⁵ Thou hast dealt well with thy servant, O LORD,
According unto thy word
⁶⁶ Teach me good judgment and knowledge:
For I have believed thy commandments.
⁶⁷ Before I was afflicted I went astray:
But now have I kept thy word.
⁶⁸ Thou art good, and doest good;
Teach me thy statutes.

☞ The Psalmist's Relationship with the World ☞

- ⁶⁹ The proud have forged a lie against me:
But I will keep thy precepts with my whole heart.
⁷⁰ Their heart is as fat as grease;
But I delight in thy law.
⁷¹ It is good for me that I have been afflicted;
That I might learn thy statutes
⁷² The law of thy mouth is better unto me
Than thousands of gold and silver



ט – Teth The meaning of Teth varies from a snake, to surround, to twist or to coil. Some say that it was originally a basket or a clay jar. Some say it refers to a snake coiled in a basket. The Modern Hebrew name for the letter is Tet meaning mud or clay. All of these differences may be reconciled if one remembers that before the potter's wheel, pots were made by rolling clay into long snake-like forms that were then coiled or twisted around and pressed inside a basket of woven grass as a form and then fired; the basket burning away and the "rope pottery" being left as a beneficial pot. At its core, Teth has something to do with earthen vessels. ט – Teth has also come to be equated with that which is good (טוב – towb meaning good or beneficial in the widest sense). The least used letter in the Scriptures, Teth first occurs in Genesis 1:3-4 "And God said, Let there be light: and there was light. And God saw the light, that it was good (טוב)."

The letter is rich with Biblical imagery that helps us understand this octave. From God forming man from the dust of the ground the way a potter forms a jar from mud or clay⁵¹⁸ to the prophetic image of the potter and his jars;⁵¹⁹ from the reference to the

⁵¹⁸ Genesis 2:7 And the LORD God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul.

⁵¹⁹ Jeremiah 18:2-6 Arise, and go down to the potter's house, and there I will cause thee to hear my words. Then I went down to the potter's house, and, behold, he wrought a work on the wheels. And the vessel that he made of clay was marred in the hand of the

believer having a treasure hidden in an earthen vessel⁵²⁰ to their being a vessel unto honor;⁵²¹ the scriptures abound in references to clay pots or vessels and their makers. Man, himself, is clearly likened to a pot formed by God and pronounced good or beneficial.

There is a certain similarity between this octave and the last. Structurally both ט – teth and פ – cheth have a break at mid octave where the view of the psalmist shifts from his spiritual relationship with God to his painful relationship with the wicked and the proud.

פ – cheth

⁶¹ The bands of the wicked have robbed me:
But I have not forgotten thy law.

...

ט – teth

⁶⁹ The proud have forged a lie against me:
But I will keep thy precepts with my whole heart.

In addition, the two prayers uttered in each octave are linked. In the preceding octave the opening prayer for mercy (be merciful unto me according to thy word – 58b) was linked to the second prayer for instruction as an expression of that mercy (The earth, O LORD, is full of thy mercy: teach me thy statutes - 64). While the fidelity of God to His word is the basis for showing mercy, the showing of His mercy is the basis for His instruction of the psalmist in His statutes.

In this octave we also find two prayers which are connected. But here, they both center on instruction: "Teach me good judgment and knowledge" (66a), and "Teach me thy statutes" (68b); the latter being identical to the prayer of (64b). The psalmist's prayer in (68b), however, cites a different reason. The first prayer cites the mercy of the LORD (The earth, O LORD, is full of thy mercy: teach me thy statutes – 64), while the second prayer cites the goodness of the LORD as its basis (68a "Thou art good and doest good, Teach me thy statutes."). Indeed, we might say that while the entire octave, פ – cheth, turns on the mercy of the LORD, while the next octave, ט – teth, turns on His goodness. In ט – teth, the psalmist uses the word for good (טוב – towb) five times: "Thou hast dealt well (טוב) with thy servant, O LORD, according unto thy word. (65). ... Thou art

potter: so he made it again another vessel, as seemed good to the potter to make it. Then the word of the LORD came to me, saying, "O house of Israel, cannot I do with you as this potter?" saith the LORD. Behold, as the clay is in the potter's hand, so are ye in mine hand, O house of Israel.

⁵²⁰ 2 Corinthians 4:6 -7 "For God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. But we have this treasure in earthen vessels that the excellency of the power may be of God, and not of us."

⁵²¹ 2 Timothy 2:20 - 21 But in a great house there are not only vessels of gold and of silver, but also of wood and of earth; and some to honor, and some to dishonor. If a man, therefore, purges himself from these, he shall be a vessel unto honor, sanctified, and meet for the master's use, and prepared unto every good work.

good (טוב) and doest good (טוב); teach me thy statutes. (68) ... It is good (טוב) for me that I have been afflicted; that I might learn thy statutes. (71) ... The law of thy mouth is better (טוב) unto me than thousands of gold and silver. (72)

Taken together, these two octaves (ח – cheth and ט – teth) intimately link the goodness of God with the mercy of God. This explicit linkage occurs in only one other place in the Old Testament, but it is significant.

Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me
All the days of my life:
And I will dwell in the house of the LORD
For ever.⁵²²

While the last octave ended with the prayer for instruction, in this octave we learn that the prayer has been answered, not in some sterile classroom situation, but in the hurly-burly of a life of struggle and suffering. “Before I was afflicted I went astray” (67) ... “Thou art good, and doest good; teach me thy statutes (68)” ... “It is good for me that I have been afflicted; that I might learn thy statutes” (71). There is also an inherent parallelism between the two halves of this octave:

☞ *The Psalmist’s Relationship with God* ☞

- 65 Thou hast dealt well with thy servant, O LORD,
According unto thy word
- 66 Teach me good judgment and knowledge:
For I have believed thy commandments.
- 67 Before I was afflicted I went astray:
But now have I kept thy word.
- 68 Thou art good, and doest good;
Teach me thy statutes.

☞ *The Psalmist’s Relationship with the World* ☞

- 69 The proud have forged a lie against me:
But I will keep thy precepts with my whole heart.
- 70 Their heart is as fat as grease; (*i.e. unteachable*)
But I delight in thy law.
- 71 It is good for me that I have been afflicted;
That I might learn thy statutes
- 72 The law of thy mouth is better unto me
Than thousands of gold and silver

The two halves of this octave give us an insight into the difficulties of the psalmist’s inner life and the painful circumstances that shape it. In 65/69, we see the contrast between God’s dealings with His servant and those of the proud. In 66/70 we see the contrast between the teach-ability of the psalmist and the proud. In 67/71 we see the means by which his repeated prayer “teach me thy statutes” was answered: affliction. Before he was afflicted, he went astray (67a). But after his beneficial affliction, his prayer has been answered and he has learned God’s statutes (71) and now he keeps thy word (67b). 68/72 tells us again of the goodness of God whose law is more precious than silver or gold. In short, the psalmist concludes that this shaping of his inner life by outward adversity has been a good thing for him and that it has all been the result of God’s operations in his life which are also good. The operations of God are good because God is good. Without saying so directly, it is clear that the psalmist has learned an important lesson. There are two ways of learning: the easy way by listening and

⁵²² Psalm 23:6

believing and the hard way by experience. This octave tells us that he is well acquainted with the latter and now prefers the former. Along with his changing attitude toward learning is a changed view of the value of God's word. Now he tells God (and us if we will listen) that, "The law of thy mouth is better unto me than thousands of gold and silver."

If we remember that **ט** - teth, as a word, suggests the shaping of an earthen vessel, then it follows that the goodness and the mercy of God that follow the psalmist "all the days of my life" are not unlike the potter's fingers working together, inside and outside, as they follow one another in the shaping of the clay vessel on the wheel through all its process of formation. What was true for the psalmist is certainly true for all those whom God is shaping them into vessels of honor,⁵²³ vessels of clay meant to contain the treasure of "the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ"⁵²⁴ - a treasure of surpassing Excellency. Such a wonderful end is and should be a great comfort and encouragement for all those who are learning "good judgment and knowledge" as well as the perfect "statutes" of God in the furnace of personal affliction.

The Surety of Goodness and Mercy

⁶⁴ The earth, O LORD, is full of thy mercy:

Teach me thy statutes.

ט TETH

⁶⁵ Thou hast dealt well with thy servant, O LORD,
According unto thy word.

⁶⁶ Teach me good judgment and knowledge:
For I have believed thy commandments.

ס

This octave's letter, **ט** (teth) has various meanings. It can mean clay or a snake or a snake coiled in a basket. These diverse meanings come together when we think about pottery formed using grass baskets. In that method, a snake-like roll of clay is coiled inside a grass vessel and pressed against the outer supporting grass wall. Placed in the fire the grass support burns away as the clay is transformed into a useful stand-alone vessel.

⁵²³ Romans 9:21-24 Does not the potter have the right to make out of the same lump of clay some pottery for noble purposes and some for common use? What if God, choosing to show his wrath and make his power known, bore with great patience the objects of his wrath-- prepared for destruction? What if he did this to make the riches of his glory known to the objects of his mercy, whom he prepared in advance for glory- even us, whom he also called, not only from the Jews but also from the Gentiles?

⁵²⁴ 2 Corinthians 4:6-7 For God, who said, "Let light shine out of darkness," made his light shine in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ. But we have this treasure in jars of clay to show that this all-surpassing power is from God and not from us.

While bridging a change of octave, these verses present an intrinsic unity via the recurring petition; “teach me.” This petition occurs three times in verses 64, 66, and 68. But the octave’s letter suggests that the psalmist does not see the act of teaching merely as a basis for conceptual learning. Teaching is about transformation, just as the clay, formed in a grass mold, was transformed by the fire into a useful pottery vessel. The process parabolically describes the psalmist’s experience of God’s answer to his recurrent prayer to be taught.

It is interesting to note that the basis for each petition, “teach me” is different. In verse 64, mercy is the basis for the plea. “The earth, O LORD, is full of thy mercy: teach me thy statutes.” In verse 65, 66a it is the good promise of God that is the basis for the plea. “Do good to your servant according to your word, O LORD. Teach me knowledge and good judgment...” (NIV) In verse 68 it is the intrinsic goodness of God and the manifestation of that goodness apart from any articulated promise that forms the basis of the plea. “Thou art good and doest good; teach me thy statutes.” This octave is marked by the word טוב (pronounced tobe)⁵²⁵ which is used as an adjective and as a noun meaning good in the widest sense. So, whereas the last octave stressed the mercy of God as the basis for his plea, this octave stresses the goodness of God.

The use of the adjective good, then as now, was indicative of a manner of life much to be desired: the good life. In this age the adjective good is all too often thought of as a stand-alone attribute. Life may be good but not necessarily as the result of some prior cause outside our self. Good just seems to happen, or we hope it will happen, or we hope we can make it happen. Verse 65 presents a very different picture. Good is something that happens because God does well by us according to His word. The “good life” has its source in God and is neither an accident nor our doing. Such a realization immediately challenges the current association of the good with pleasure (i.e. things are good when we feel good). Rather the psalmist associates good with moral rectitude and holiness. Things are good because God, the holy and righteous One, is good and does good to us as an expression of His character. “Thou art good, and doest good...” (Verse 68a)

Furthermore, the psalmist tells us that the good that God would bestow is to be obtained by means of that for which he pleads three times: to be taught of God. But if, as we have noted, teaching is not just about gathering conceptual knowledge but spiritual transformation, then our highest good (*summum bonum*) is to be transformed by the hand of God into one who is truly like Him in goodness; to be transformed into

⁵²⁵ The word טוב (pronounced tobe) occurs five times in this octave. Its use in these first two verses is as follows:

⁶⁵ Thou hast dealt well {טוב} with thy servant, O LORD,

According unto thy word

⁶⁶ Teach me good {טוב} judgment and knowledge:

For I have believed thy commandments.

His image.⁵²⁶ If such learning results in our being transformed to be like God in goodness; then it must of necessity also issue in our doing good. Because we too are good, therefore we do good. Good, then is not just something that happens, willy-nilly, to us. It is an attribute that we acquire which becomes the source of our doing good to others. This forms the basis of much Christian exhortation and is integral to the Gospel.

*“For the grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men, teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world; looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Savior Jesus Christ; Who gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works. These things speak, and exhort, and rebuke with all authority. Let no man despise thee.”*⁵²⁷

Here we refer back to the initial theme that introduced this psalm: the blessed life (i.e. the truly happy life). The truly happy life is the life which has been transformed so that as God is in Himself, so we are in similarity to Him. And in this similarity, is found spiritual harmony with God

Finally, these two verses associate goodness and mercy as the twin basis for that teaching which transforms our life. This tells us that the good life is also the merciful life. The criteria, then, of whether we have been truly taught of God lies in the character of life that we are now living. Do we indeed walk in the law of the LORD? Do we keep his testimonies? Do we that seek him with the whole heart? Do we walk in his ways? In perhaps the best known of all the psalms, the psalmist reminds us that goodness and mercy can and do follow us all the days of our lives.⁵²⁸ But what does that mean to us? It reminds us that God’s schoolroom is open to us continually if only we are willing to emulate the psalmist’s prayer and say with our heart: “Teach me.”

Developing a Taste for God

⁶⁶ Teach me good judgment and knowledge:
For I have believed thy commandments.



As noted in the last lesson, the psalmist believes that the good which God desires to bestow is obtained by means of that for which he pleads three times: to be taught of God. But exactly what is he asking to be taught and why? In verses 64 and 68 he pleads that God would teach him “His statutes,” That repeated request rests, as we have seen, upon God’s mercy (64)⁵²⁹ and God’s goodness (68)⁵³⁰ Here the psalmist requests two

⁵²⁶ This harks back to the very first recorded intention of God in the creation of humanity: “And God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness: and let them have dominion ...” Genesis 1:26a

⁵²⁷ Titus 2:11 -15

⁵²⁸ Psalm 23:6a

⁵²⁹ Psalm 119:64 The earth, O LORD, is full of thy mercy: teach me thy statutes.

different subjects: judgment and knowledge. And the basis for his request is also different: “Teach me ... for I have believed thy commandments.” The word translated “judgment” in this verse is not the usual term **משפט** mishpat, which means a verdict. It is **טִיִּם** (pronounced tah'-am) and comes from a primitive root which means to taste or perceive. **טִיִּם** refers figuratively to perception and, by implication, the ability to discern subtle differences not only in taste, but in reasoning, action, intents, and consequences. This word occurs only here in this psalm in connection with knowledge. The word for knowledge is **דַּעַת** (pronounced dah'-ath) and comes from a primitive root **יָדַע** (pronounced yaw-dah') which means to know (properly, to ascertain by seeing) in a great variety of senses, figuratively, literally, euphemistically and inferentially. So, the knowledge the psalmist pleads for has an experiential quality to it. It is the word used to describe the tree of the knowledge (**דַּעַת** - da'ath) of good and evil. The knowledge which Adam and Eve sought was fundamentally (and tragically) experimental in nature.

Placed in association with the word for good (**טוֹב** tuwb), the two words indicate the importance that the psalmist placed on discernment or proper reasoning based on true knowledge in achieving that which is good.

“Enable me to learn goodness of discernment and acknowledgement,
Because I have trusted in your commands”

*“Goodness (**טוֹב** tuwb) of discernment is the capacity to make insightful decisions, which will also be ones that have good outcomes. They will be morally good, and therefore experientially good. De Facto, “good-ness” will also apply to acknowledgement. We ask YHVH to teach us to acknowledge things that are good to acknowledge, such as YHVH’s decisions and declarations (vv. 75, 79,125); these, too, will be good for us. We do so on the basis of being people who have trusted that YHVH’s commands can be YHVH’s means of bringing all this about.”⁵³¹*

Finally, the knowledge to which the psalmist refers is not purely discoverable by reason. It is revealed knowledge; hence the assertion: “for I have believed thy commandments.” In short, he wants to have experiential, first-hand knowledge of the inner workings of the commandments, which he believes contain the truth. But to have this, God must reveal those workings to him so that he can acknowledge them as being true.

Beyond the two individual roles that discernment and right knowledge as learned from “thy commandments” play; there is an obvious a cooperative role for the two. Our good depends upon our knowledge of the good (or our acknowledgement of it) and our

⁵³⁰ Psalm 119:68 Thou art good, and doest good; teach me thy statutes.

⁵³¹ John Goldingay translation and comment from Page 407 Psalms Volume 3: Psalms 90-150, Published by Baker Academic, ISBN 978-0-8010-3143-4 (cloth v. 3)

ability to apply that knowledge effectively in everyday situations. One may have all the tools of the carpenter and yet not be able to use them for want of skill in their use. Or one may have all the necessary mechanical knowledge about an engine but be unable to fix it for want of a particular wrench. Knowledge of good and the skill to apply that knowledge go hand in hand to affect “good” outcomes in our life. Having a piano in the living room does not mean we will hear music from it if we cannot play it, and a great pianist can make no music for want of an instrument. We must have both.

But the issue of these analogies, as does the octave of this psalm, all point to goodness: a good house, a well-maintained car, good music in our living room and (ultimately) a good life. These are all experiential. The knowledge of what is good and our ability to tell the difference between what is good and not good, rests upon our experience of the good. And this experience, this type of learning, is transformational. It is also connected integrally with the Person of God as teacher. The psalms provide us an invitation to such experience in terms not unlike those of being invited to a banquet in which the meal is not only provided by God but is God, Himself.

“O taste (טעם - ta`am) and see that the LORD is good (טוב tuwb):
Blessed (אשר 'esher) is the man that trusteth in him.”⁵³²

The knowledge of good and the ability to develop a “taste” for good are really founded in our personal experience of God, Himself. As noted before, this is not purely cerebral (though our cognitive processes may be involved), but experiential and transformative. In ‘tasting’ God we immediately develop a taste for Him. The appetite for Truth is wetted and our unfathomable desire for Him is unleashed, so that we can say with the hymn writer:

“O Christ, in thee my soul hath found,
And found in thee alone,
The peace and joy I sought so long
The bliss till now unknown.

Now none but Christ can satisfy
None other name for me!
There’s love and life and lasting joy
Christ Jesus found in thee.”⁵³³

⁵³² Psalm 34:8

⁵³³ Emma Francis Bevan 1827 - 1909

The Importance of Suffering

⁶⁷ Before I was afflicted I went astray;
But now have I kept thy word.

⁶⁸ Thou art good, and doest good;
Teach me thy statutes.

...

⁷¹ It is good for me that I have been afflicted;
That I might learn thy statutes.



These three unassuming little verses represent the intersection of at least three problems of great importance: The definition of what is good (71a and by inference the problem of evil), the problem of suffering (67a & 71a affliction), and the role of divine providence in the formation of the spiritual life. These issues are foundational to the message of the scriptures and it would be hard to overstate their importance to each of us.

What is good - What is good is one of the great questions that humans have been wrestling with for centuries. The Greek notion that ‘the good’ represents the intersection of ‘the truth’ and ‘the beautiful’ was central to their philosophic enquiries. The question, what is truth leads to our interest in the sciences. The question, what is beauty leads to our interest in the arts. The question what is good leads to our interest in philosophy and religion. The good of the psalmist has no such laborious overtones. God is good. (Verse 68a) Therefore, God does good. (Verse 68b) And to live in harmony with God is to live a blessed or good life. But that goodness is not something to be speculated over and pursued by the zealous junior philosopher. It is a good that is to be experienced by the average believer in God’s word and learned by having God teach the individual (verses 64b, 66b, 68b). Happiness is learned. But the transformational learning that comes by experience can be painful.

Suffering and the problem of Evil – Why do people suffer is a great question that is linked to the notion of good in a subtle way. In defining the good, we, in effect, must define what is not good. If we stick strictly to a cause and effect view of life, that which is not good is anything that is counter-productive to good or desired ends. It is not good that we let our automobile run out of oil, because the engine will seize and cease to function. Then we will pay for a very expensive engine repair, and that is not good economically, since it might have been avoided with a comparatively inexpensive oil change.

But human suffering has long been recognized to have moral overtones. When looked at through a moral lens, not good is characterized under the rubric of evil. Defining good, for the thinking person, inevitably raises the problem of evil. What is evil? Why has a good God allowed evil to exist in His creation? The problem of evil is the first real

human problem that the Bible raises. Adam and Eve ate the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. The very name implies that they were seeking a kind of knowledge (and power?) that was experiential. It involved ingesting a piece of fruit that they expected would convey that experiential knowledge. Notice it was the tree of the knowledge of *good and evil*. What is good and what is evil are the two sides of a single coin. To define the one, inevitably raises the other. Usually pleasure is viewed as the sensate counterpart of good and pain or suffering with evil. “Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity!” says the psalmist.⁵³⁴ Human observation of wars and unrest of all types should convince us that what we customarily call evil causes suffering. While the consequences of evil involve suffering for others, when evil doers suffer for their crimes, it accords well with our innate sense of justice. But what are we to think about those ‘innocents’ who suffered at the hands of evil doers. Does the suffering of their tormentors compensate for their affliction? We are left with a persistent undertone of the problem of evil: “Why do good people suffer?”

Divine Providence – Without once ever mentioning it, the resolution of these vexing problems (What is good and how do we obtain it - the problem of suffering and the problem of evil and how do we avoid them) is addressed in the psalmist’s belief in the intervention of the divine hand in his life; in divine providence that answers his prayers. Even if we divorce the problem of suffering from the problem of evil; even if suffering is just happenstance (i.e. suffering happens to all of us regardless); we can see that our finitude and mutability are somehow involved. While becoming evil involves our peccability (a moral manifestation of our mutability), suffering simply involves change in a finite context. We all change and that involves suffering the loss of something that we very likely felt was good. We grow old and lose our youth. We grow weak and lose our health. We grow old and weak and lose our lives. We esteem youth, health and life as ‘good’ and old age, sickness, and death as ‘evil’. This triad of misery is the classic representation of universal suffering in many cultures. And they are the inevitable consequence of our mutability and finitude. Nothing good lasts. Enter divine providence! The picture of  teth as clay coiled pottery formed by pressing the clay against the wall of a grass basket and then firing it lies behind these verses. Notice the process the psalmist describes:

1. “Before I was afflicted I went astray.” I had no respect for your statutes. I transgressed. I did evil in your sight. Also, I was morally malleable like clay. I was not serviceable as a pot.

⁵³⁴ Psalm 133:1

2. "The bands of the wicked have robbed me."⁵³⁵ "The proud have forged a lie against me."⁵³⁶ Evil men have brought painful and suffering into my life. Why has your hand allowed this affliction?
3. "I was afflicted ... that I might learn thy statutes." The hand of God has both pressed the life of the psalmist against the restraints of an unhappy life and placed the whole in the fire of affliction. The result is that all which once caused pain, the restraint of the grass basket has been burned away and the life of the psalmist transformed in the fires of his affliction. His prayer "teach me thy statutes" has been answered and he now sees the purpose of his suffering.
4. "It is good for me that I have been afflicted" Suffering, heretofore linked to the problem of evil, is now seen as a fundamental good because the psalmist's pain was not the central issue. His life had been one prone to disobedience but ...
5. "...now have I kept thy word." And this change is not one subject to change. The process of firing clay into pottery is fundamentally irreversible. The moral tone of the psalmist's life has been changed eternally.

Human mutability (peccability) and finitude have been effectively dealt with by the hand of God in a painful but necessary process that has resulted in the irreversible transformation of the individual who will now live forever in blessed harmony with God. "Now no chastening for the present seemeth to be joyous, but grievous: nevertheless, afterward it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness unto them which are exercised thereby."⁵³⁷

The Answer of Humility

- ⁶⁹ The proud have forged a lie against me:
 But I will keep thy precepts with my whole heart.
⁷⁰ Their heart is as fat as grease;
 But I delight in thy law.



In these two verses, the psalmist compares his action (69b) and his motive (70b) in response to the action of the proud (69a) that results from their inner character (70a). Given the location of these verses between 67 and 71 both of which speak of affliction, it is likely that the affliction spoken of is described specifically here. It is also a comparison of the psalmist's heart (I will keep thy precepts with my whole heart) with the heart of the proud (their heart is as fat as grease). Here again we have the human aspect of the proud, willful, or arrogant, who take offense at the psalmist. Their answer

⁵³⁵ Psalm 119:61a

⁵³⁶ Psalm 119:69a

⁵³⁷ Hebrews 12:11

to his longing for the truth is to discredit him ⁵³⁸ with a lie. The animosity toward the psalmist in spreading lies about him is to give the appearance that he is other than he tells us that he is. Whereas he wants to learn from God and be obedient, these maintain that he is far from being what he claims to be. But why should the proud impugn the character of the psalmist? The answer lies in the attractiveness of the psalmist's godliness to his companions. "I am a companion of all them that fear thee, and of them that keep thy precepts." (Verse 63) As the psalmist's companions would keep God's precepts so the psalmist affirms that he "will keep thy precepts with my whole heart." The proud seek to drive a wedge between the psalmist and his companions. If the psalmist can be discredited in the eyes of his companions, then the proud can garner additional support for themselves by means of their lies. In a step of remarkable irony, they openly accuse the psalmist of exactly what they are secretly guilty of themselves – not keeping God's precepts because they arrogantly refuse to humble themselves to God's governance. But to gain power over the psalmist's companions, they must pretend to be exactly what the psalmist actually is, one who openly desires to know the truth from God. Contrary to the appearances gendered by their lies, they have no interest in God who is Truth. Their only desire is for power and control over the minds and wills of men. Such animosity is not just directed against the psalmist, but against God, Himself. It is the ancient *modus operandi* of the adversary Satan. Jesus affirms to those who would detract from His ministry, "Ye are of your father the devil, and the lusts of your father ye will do. He was a murderer from the beginning, and abode not in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaketh a lie, he speaketh of his own: for he is a liar, and the father of it. And because I tell you the truth, ye believe me not. Which of you convicts me of sin? And if I say the truth, why do ye not believe me? He that is of God heareth God's words: ye therefore hear them not, because ye are not of God." But those whom Jesus rebuked, persisted in their slander as their answer makes clear. "Then answered the Jews, and said unto him, 'Say we not well that thou art a Samaritan, and hast a devil?'" Jesus answered this renewed slander, "I have not a devil; but I honor my Father, and ye do dishonor me. And I seek not mine own glory: there is one that seeketh and judges. Verily, verily, I say unto you, if a man keeps my saying, he shall never see death." Having heard this, their answer was to reaffirm (*ad nauseam*) their lie. "Then said the Jews unto him, 'Now we know that thou hast a devil.'" ⁵³⁹ Instead of recognizing the truth of His compassionate words and miraculous ministry, they only further entrenched themselves in their lies about Him.

⁵³⁸ The word translated "forge" is **טפּל** taphal, (pronounced taw-fal') a primitive root meaning, properly, to stick on as a patch and figuratively to impute falsely as in the case of a forgery. The image is not so much as forging iron as the forgery of a signature that purports to be real and authentic but is not since the person being slandered did not sign it. A forged check, if honored for example, will definitely affect your credit. It will dis-credit you.

⁵³⁹ This entire discourse is found in John 8:44-52

The psalmist shows us the locus of the root problem in those who sought to gain power through slander – their heart. “A good man out of the good treasure of his heart bringeth forth that which is good; and an evil man out of the evil treasure of his heart bringeth forth that which is evil: for of the abundance of the heart his mouth speaketh.”⁵⁴⁰ The heart of the proud, the psalmist tells us, “is as fat as grease” but the psalmist “will keep thy precepts with my whole heart.” The description the heart of the proud is parabolic of an inner life that has grown increasingly insensitive to the word of God. Willful ignoring of the Word of Truth has gone from an isolated sin to an entrenched vice, so that their hearts are no longer sensitive to the gentle goading of specific instances of the truth. We could view their heart condition as a matter of their spiritual state. But we can also see these contrasting passages on the heart of the psalmist and the heart of the proud as a witness of two contradictory processes. In terms of the precepts that the psalmist and his companions are intent on keeping, the scripture tells how God undertakes to instruct those who are willing to learn.

*“Whom shall he teach knowledge? And whom shall he make to understand doctrine? Them that are weaned from the milk, and drawn from the breasts. For precept must be upon precept, precept upon precept; line upon line, line upon line; here a little, and there a little.”*⁵⁴¹

But does God deal differently with the proud? Is the lack of truth in their life the result of God withholding truth from them? Isaiah goes on to describe God’s dealing with the proud liars.

*“For with stammering lips and another tongue will he speak to this people, to whom he said, ‘This is the rest wherewith ye may cause the weary to rest; and this is the refreshing.’ Yet they would not hear. But the word of the LORD was unto them precept upon precept, precept upon precept; line upon line, line upon line; here a little, and there a little; that they might go, and fall backward, and be broken, and snared, and taken.”*⁵⁴²

There is coherence in the truth, but every rejection of any instance of truth must of necessity be a substitution of a lie, and eventually when truth has been systematically rejected again and again, the lies substituted in each place also become coherent. Individual lies, which were intended to deceive, link end to end until at last the arrogant and self-willed are enclosed in a complete system of delusion. Their hearts are no longer sensitive to any truth. “Their heart is as fat as grease.” The consequences of such a life are tragic indeed. What then is the end of all such delusive systems? The prophet Isaiah is given the answer as a remarkable Messianic prophesy,

“Therefore, thus saith the Lord GOD, Behold, I lay in Zion for a foundation a stone, a tried stone, a precious corner stone, a sure foundation: he that believeth shall not make haste. Judgment also

⁵⁴⁰ Luke 6:45

⁵⁴¹ Isaiah 28:9 - 10

⁵⁴² Isaiah 28:11 - 13

*will I lay to the line, and righteousness to the plummet: and the hail shall sweep away the refuge of lies, and the waters shall overflow the hiding place.”*⁵⁴³

Treasure in Earthen Vessels

⁷² The law of thy mouth is better unto me
Than thousands of gold and silver



The psalmist ends this octave with a summation that is at once illuminating, personal, and challenging. The psalmist tells us his valuation of the law of God’s mouth for which he has been pleading, setting that valuation in contradistinction to gold and silver. Gold and silver, then as now, are not only universal poetic references to wealth, but are also the actual measures of it. To this day, gold and silver are foundational to systems of exchange and often are seen as a hedge against vicissitudes that can reduce the value of national currencies world-wide. Thousands of gold and silver is not a numerical description, but a conceptual way of describing what the world would see as great wealth. Though made ages ago, the statement still conveys that view of wealth. But there are two value systems implicit here: the world’s value system based on precious metals and the psalmist’s personal value system based on his possession of the knowledge of God’s word and the price in suffering that he has paid to gain that knowledge experientially. More than a contrast, however, the value systems (precious metals vs. precious words of God) are in stark contrast to one another. The value of the knowledge of God lies not just in the desire that brought forth the psalmist’s prayers or in the cost in affliction paid to gain that personal, experimental knowledge, but in its intrinsic value in the business of living a life pleasing to God. “Behold, all souls are mine; as the soul of the father, so also the soul of the son is mine: the soul that sinneth, it shall die.”⁵⁴⁴

Thousands in gold and silver may convey the ability to live in luxury and pleasure, but they cannot buy an eternal life lived in happy communion with God. “They that trust in their wealth, and boast themselves in the multitude of their riches; none of them can by any means redeem his brother, nor give to God a ransom for him (*the ransom for a life is costly, no payment is ever enough ~ NIV*) that he should still live forever, and not see corruption. ... This their way is their folly: yet their posterity approves their sayings. Selah.”⁵⁴⁵ Jesus advances very much the same argument about the preciousness of the human soul in contradistinction to wealth: “For what is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? Or what shall a man give in exchange for his

⁵⁴³ Isaiah 28:16-17

⁵⁴⁴ Ezekiel 18:4

⁵⁴⁵ Psalm 46:6-9, 13

soul?"⁵⁴⁶ The verse in hand also stresses the personal valuation of the worth of God's Word. "The law of thy mouth is better unto me" than what the world commonly measures worth by. A happy relationship with the LORD is always a One on one relationship and intensely personal. "The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want."⁵⁴⁷

The note of value accords well with the undertone of this octave ~ the clay pot. In an uncertain age when there were no banks to safely preserve personal wealth, ancient people resorted to burying their gold, silver, and bronze coins in sealed clay jars or pots. Wood or iron boxes would degrade and were more expensive, but everyone had clay pots and they would not rot in the ground.

"Much of what we know about ancient coinage comes from such hoards that were buried and never retrieved. The beginning of coinage is documented by a hoard – a sealed clay pot holding 19 archaic electrum coins. It was deposited beneath the seventh century BC foundation of the Temple of Artemis at Ephesus. ... Such "votive hoards" were permanent offerings to the gods buried with no intent to recover them later."⁵⁴⁸

The picture of thousands of gold and silver buried in sealed clay pots becomes parabolic of the formation of the psalmist's spiritual life that we have been considering under the similitude of grass rope pottery manufacture. The description of "the law of thy mouth" as treasure more precious than silver or gold explains the great purpose of the psalmist's formation: he has become a vessel that has the honor to be a secret repository of God's greatest treasure His Word. "For God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellency of the power may be of God, and not of us."⁵⁴⁹ Unlike earthly hoards, that were accidentally abandoned, God's hidden treasure vessels will never be abandoned. That which the psalmist and we contain within our very being is a glory waiting to be revealed.

"Beloved, think it not strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened unto you: But rejoice, inasmuch as ye are partakers of Christ's sufferings; that, when his glory shall be revealed, ye may be glad also with exceeding joy. If ye be reproached for the name of Christ, happy are ye; for the spirit of glory and of God resteth upon you: on their part he is evil spoken of, but on your part he is glorified."⁵⁵⁰ ... "For I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us."⁵⁵¹

⁵⁴⁶ Matthew 16:26

⁵⁴⁷ Psalm 1:1 Note that the psalmist does not say, our shepherd, their shepherd, or his shepherd, even though such a statement could be true. The joy of fellowship with God is first and foremost personal.

⁵⁴⁸ From *Hordes of Hoards: Some recent and Classic Finds of Ancient Coins* by Michael Markowitz in *Coin Week Magazine* June 16, 2016

⁵⁴⁹ 2 Corinthians 4:6-7

⁵⁵⁰ 1 Peter 4:12 - 14

⁵⁵¹ Romans 8:18

י (JOD)

☞ The Psalmist's Testimony and Desire ☞

- ⁷³ Thy hands have made me and fashioned me:
Give me understanding, that I may learn thy commandments.
- ⁷⁴ They that fear thee will be glad when they see me;
Because I have hoped in thy word
- ⁷⁵ I know, O LORD, that thy judgments are right,
And that thou in faithfulness hast afflicted me.

☞ The Psalmist's Five-fold Prayer ☞

- ⁷⁶ Let, I pray thee, thy merciful kindness be for my comfort,
According to thy word unto thy servant
- ⁷⁷ Let thy tender mercies come unto me,
That I may live: for thy law is my delight.
- ⁷⁸ Let the proud be ashamed;
For they dealt perversely with me without a cause:
But I will meditate in thy precepts.
- ⁷⁹ Let those that fear thee turn unto me,
And those that have known thy testimonies
- ⁸⁰ Let my heart be sound in thy statutes;
That I be not ashamed



י – **Jod** means a Hand. The picture evoked is that of a hand closed upon a piece of work. This octave carries forward the themes developed in the last octave. There we saw the parabolic view of the psalmist as a vessel of clay being formed by the hand of God. Here the psalmist begins with the clear statement, “Thy hands have made me and fashioned me.” In so stating this reality of his spiritual formation, he shifts focus from self as a clay vessel being formed to the hand of God which has been shaping him. In making this shift, the psalmist opens the view of God’s activities from a relatively narrow one of the potter and his pot to a much wider view that can include many different activities of God’s ‘hand’. It is not just the potter’s hand controlling the formation of a clay vessel, but the hand of God controlling everything. Hence the psalmist’s two-fold prayer for instruction in ת – Teth becomes a much more general petition in י – Jod relating to God’s control.

The psalmist also carries forward the theme of affliction. His life before affliction was prone to error, “Before I was afflicted, I went astray” (67a). The answer to his prayer, “teach me thy statutes” (64b, 68b), was answered in affliction. “It was good that for me that I have been afflicted that I might learn thy statutes” (71). In this octave he associates the source of his affliction not with the proud “who have forged a lie against me” (69a)

and who “dealt perversely with me without a cause” (78b), but with God whose judgments are right and who had “in faithfulness afflicted me” (75). Again, we see the two-fold action of the hand of God fashioning the spiritual life of the psalmist by applying the pressure of affliction to the external life (using the proud as instruments) while supporting the psalmist inwardly through his meditation on “thy precepts” (78c), and his whole-hearted keeping of them (69b). In other words, by reflecting on what he knows of God’s thought patterns and sticking to them, in difficult times, the psalmist is learning about how God’s commandments play out in the statutes that he has asked to be taught. Suffering has internalized the word of God in such a way that it is not possible for him to be ashamed or confused in discerning what is right or what is wrong in any of life’s myriad situations. This puts us in mind of Paul’s admonition to young Timothy, “Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth.”⁵⁵²

It is against this background that the psalmist advances his six petitions that may be linked under three intentions: continued progress in the statutes, emotional support during the learning process, and for those around the psalmist.⁵⁵³

1. Give me understanding (73)
2. Let ... thy merciful kindness be for my comfort (76)
3. Let thy tender mercies come unto me ... for thy law is my delight (77)
4. Let the proud be ashamed (78)
5. Let those that fear thee and have known thy testimonies turn unto me (79)
6. Let my heart be sound in thy statutes (80)

Of these six prayers, we find intention in three of them, *vis-à-vis* the word of God

1. That I may learn thy commandments. (73)
2. That I may live: (77)
3. That I be not ashamed (80)

Not only has God created the psalmist but He is fashioning him into the person he should be.

⁵⁵² 2 Timothy 2:15

⁵⁵³ Note the recurrence of the word “let” in all but one of the petitions. The word let does not occur in the Hebrew. It is supplied by the translators. The Elizabethan use of the word “let” implies hindrance as well as permission. Both are operations associated with the hand. Here, the psalmist clearly wants God to permit what is requested. But the scope of the word “let” suggests that God could just as easily not permit it but withhold what is asked. It is in this sense that Paul uses the term in 2 Thessalonians 2:3-7 “**Let** no man deceive you (*i.e. do not permit any man to deceive you*) by any means: for that day shall not come, except there come a falling away first, and that man of sin be revealed, the son of perdition; Who opposeth and exalteth himself above all that is called God, or that is worshipped; so that he as God sitteth in the temple of God, showing himself that he is God. Remember ye not, that, when I was yet with you, I told you these things? And now ye know what withholdeth that he might be revealed in his time. For the mystery of iniquity doth already work: only he who now **letteth** will **let**, until (*i.e. he who now withholds permission will continue to withhold permission, until...*) he be taken out of the way.” To let in this usage is to withhold permission until the appointed time. So, lying behind the repeated petition “let” is the sense that God is in control of all that is asked and has the freedom to grant or not to grant the request. The prayers rest upon the sense of God’s controlling hand.

Prayers for continued progress in the statutes: Give me understanding that I may learn thy commandments: (73b) ... Let my heart be sound in thy statutes that I be not ashamed (80) The first and last petitions of this octave are linked. The fundamental prayer for instruction in the statutes is followed by a request for a foundational understanding of the commandments on which the statutes rest. This is not so much about memorizing the Decalogue as understanding how God would have them applied in all of life. The statutes are hardly exhaustive of all possible situations in life, but an understanding of how individual statutes are derived from the commandments will greatly aide in achieving the real goal of soundness in the statutes. Then there will be no confusion (and shame) when the psalmist encounters new and heretofore unexamined situations in life. The psalmist prays for the hand of God to teach.

Prayers for emotional support during the learning process: The psalmist has seen the affliction of God's hand (75b) now he prays for the hand of God to comfort: "Let, I pray thee, thy merciful kindness be for my comfort (76a) ... Let thy tender mercies come unto me that I may live." (77) The whole process of learning has involved so much suffering, that one has the sense that the psalmist's very life has been threatened. So much has he suffered, that he asks not only for merciful kindness ⁵⁵⁴ as comfort for the sufferings of his affliction but that God's tender mercies ⁵⁵⁵ might preserve his failing life. Even if we set aside the notion the words "that I may live" refer to a continuation of physical life, we cannot overlook the possibility of a depression giving way to despondency which is a kind of death of the spiritual life.

Prayers for those around the psalmist: Let the proud be ashamed (78) ... Let those that fear thee and have known thy testimonies turn unto me (79) The psalmist referred to two groups around him in ח cheth: the bands of the wicked (61a) and them that fear thee and that keep thy precepts (63). While the proud "who have forged a lie against me" (69a) and who "dealt perversely with me without a cause" (78b), may not represent then entire set of the wicked, surely, they are a subset. This petition wishes for them what they evidently wished for the psalmist and what he was genuinely afraid of: the shame of confusion. But for those who have been his faithful companions; for those that fear thee and keep thy precepts; for those that "have known thy testimonies" and (presumably) not paid attention to the baseless lies of the proud; for those that "will be glad when they see me; because I have hoped in thy word" (74) the psalmist prays that they would turn unto him as one whose heart is sound in thy statutes, i.e. as one who

⁵⁵⁴ חסד checed, (pronounced kheh'-sed) meaning favor, good deeds, kindly deeds, loving-kindness, or merciful kindness from a primitive root for kindness. We should remember that the original petition "teach me thy statutes" had as its basis two different but related bases: goodness (68) and mercy (64). This petition reprises the first of those bases, "the earth, O LORD, is full of thy mercy (חסד), teach me thy statutes.

⁵⁵⁵ רחם racham, (pronounced rakh'-am) from a primitive root meaning to fondle. Hence, maternal compassion by extension, the womb as cherishing the fetus and, by implication, compassion, tender love, great and tender mercy. One has the sense that the word links the preservation of life with the role of a mother.

can be trusted to provide guidance in the spiritual life (80a). Here the psalmist prays for the hand of God to govern.

The issue underlying this octave is not about the psalmist achieving sinless perfection and becoming a leader of a religious group, but rather it is about his becoming a source of counsel and encouragement because he has become a human reflection of the person of God by reason of God's dealings with him; dealings that have made him a foreshadowing of the One who was to follow after him. The one for whom they all looked, the Messiah – Jesus.

Led by God's Hand

י (JOD)

⁷³ Thy hands have made me and fashioned me:

Give me understanding, that I may learn thy commandments.



This octave carries forward the themes developed in the last octave. There we saw the parabolic view of the psalmist as a vessel of clay being formed by the hand of God. Here the psalmist begins with the clear statement, "Thy hands have made me and fashioned me." In so stating this reality of his spiritual formation, he shifts focus from himself as a clay vessel being formed to the hands of God which have been shaping him. There are three things that the psalmist tells us in this octave about what the hands of God have done for him: 1) Your hands have made me; 2) Your hands have fashioned me; and, 3) in faithfulness, you have afflicted me.

The word translated "made" is עָשָׂה `asah, (pronounced aw-saw') a primitive root which means to do or make, in the broadest sense and widest application. The word translated "fashioned" is כִּיָּן (pronounced koon) a primitive root meaning, properly, to be erect (i.e. stand perpendicular); hence (causatively) to set up. The word translated "afflicted" is עָנָה (pronounced aw-naw') a primitive root meaning to depress literally or figuratively, to abase self, to afflict. The three words taken together suggest again the work of a potter who 1) makes the clay vessel, 2) sets the vessel up (i.e. stands it erect) in the kiln, and 3) 'afflicts' the vessel in the kiln of adversity so as to transform it from useless clay to serviceable pottery. If goodness ⁵⁵⁶ and mercy ⁵⁵⁷ are the twin basis for the prayer "teach me thy statutes", and affliction the means by which the psalmist's prayer is answered, ⁵⁵⁸ then the entire foregoing work of God in making, fashioning, and afflicting is the basis for the primary prayer of this octave: "Give me understanding, that I may learn thy commandments." We note again that statutes conceptually lie atop

⁵⁵⁶ Psalm 119:68 Thou art good, and doest good; teach me thy statutes.

⁵⁵⁷ Psalm 119:64 The earth, O LORD, is full of thy mercy: teach me thy statutes.

⁵⁵⁸ Psalm 119:71 It is good for me that I have been afflicted; that I might learn thy statutes.

the more foundational commandments just as statute law rests upon constitutional law. If therefore the psalmist has learned thy statutes by means of affliction, it is reasonable that he will not want to stop there but go deeper and to understand the foundational commandments. The plea is not only reasonable but rational as well. Why would God grant his wish to learn the statutes if He was not going to take the psalmist even deeper into the profundities of His commandments? The psalmist is pleading along the trajectory of God's prior activity so that his plea accords well with exactly where he knows that God is leading him.

What is key here is not just that the psalmist's prayer aligns well with God's will but that the psalmist's prayer speaks of psalmist's willingness to align his will with the will of God. In the case of the psalmist's spiritual formation, the analogy of the pot begins to break down. A pot, once fired, is no longer pliable in the hand of the potter. But even after the transformative internalization of God's statutes through the suffering of affliction, the heart of the psalmist is more pliable than ever; his will more yielded to the will of God as He continues the psalmist's formation. Human desire to do the will of God will be supported by the hand of God forming the heart's ability to learn or to know what that will is. Jesus makes note of this important factor when He answers those Jews who "marveled, saying, 'How knoweth this man letters, having never learned?'" Jesus answered them, "My doctrine is not mine, but his that sent me. If any man will do his will, he shall know of the doctrine, whether it be of God, or whether I speak of myself." In other words, the ability to critically assess the truth of Jesus' teaching rests not with a highly educated mind, but with the heart, touched by God, desirous of doing God's will. If a person deeply wants to do God's will, God will lead that person ever deeper into an understanding of His revealed will.

But we might ask what the psalmist means by "learning thy commandments" and why does he say "give me understanding" and not "teach me" as he did relative to the statutes. Clearly as the directions of the law spread out to exert governance over ever wider and more varied human situations, their number must of necessity increase. But the commandments in their foundational role are more profound and therefore fewer in number. If the psalmist has truly learned thy statutes by means of his affliction⁵⁵⁹ and now keeps them and does not go astray⁵⁶⁰ in those areas that he has learned, why does he struggle to learn that which is less in number? Doubtless he knew the Decalogue by heart from childhood. The word translated as understanding is בִּינָה (pronounced bene) a primitive root meaning to separate mentally or distinguish or (generally) to understand. It contains concepts like to attend, to consider, to be cunning or clever, to be diligent or discerning. At its core it looks at subtle differences not just facts. The word translated "teach" is לָמַד (pronounced law-mad'), a primitive root meaning properly, to goad,

⁵⁵⁹ Ps 119:71 ¶ It is good for me that I have been afflicted; that I might learn thy statutes.

⁵⁶⁰ Ps 119:67 ¶ Before I was afflicted I went astray; but now have I kept thy word.

that is, by implication to teach (the rod being an Oriental incentive). The differences between the two words correspond to the two stages of moral or ethical development in humans. The first stage involves following rote rules with punishment for infractions. The second involves critical reasoning from first principles to establish ethical actions. When we look at the Law as a whole (תּוֹרָה - towrah or Torah, which also means teaching) there are two approaches that can be taken, the first involves multiplying rules *ad infinitum* for every possible human situation. This approach has the disadvantage of producing a codex of laws that is immense and therefore unworkable. The second approach is to lay down a few basic rules or commandments and to derive several statutes from them that address various classes of human situations. In this latter case, it is essential that the individual develop the ability to reason from basic first principles to specific instances using the existing statutes as guides. This is exactly what the psalmist is pleading for in this verse. He knows that God is One. Any word, therefore, that God communicates must of necessity be coherent with all other of His utterances in the governance of human and divine affairs. The psalmist then desires to trace this underlying coherence between specific laws or statutes back to the more general and foundational commandments. He knows that if he can discern the subtle differences that connect the class or situation specific laws back to the underlying legal principles, he will have mastered the ability to think from first principles (commandments like the Decalogue) forward to situation specific laws even when no specific law has been promulgated. In short, he is trying to understand, as much as possible for any created being, how God actually thinks. And to have that ability, that understanding, God must show him. And this desire is a hallmark of the Christian as the Apostle Paul makes clear in his letter to the church at Corinth.

*“For what man knoweth the things of a man, save the spirit of man which is in him? Even so the things of God knoweth no man, but the Spirit of God. Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the spirit which is of God; that we might know the things that are freely given to us of God. Which things also we speak, not in the words which man’s wisdom teaches, but which the Holy Ghost teaches; comparing spiritual things with spiritual. But the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned. But he that is spiritual judges all things, yet he himself is judged of no man. For who hath known the mind of the Lord, that he may instruct him? But we have the mind of Christ.”*⁵⁶¹

⁵⁶¹ 1 Corinthians 2:11 - 14

Kindred Spirits

⁷⁴ They that fear thee will be glad when they see me;
Because I have hoped in thy word.



While this psalm addresses the pursuit of a correct, harmonious, and therefore “blessed” or supremely happy relationship with the LORD, it also speaks of others with similar desires to know and love God. The psalm began with the description of some of them:

¹ Blessed are the undefiled in the way,
Who walk in the law of the LORD.
² Blessed are they that keep his testimonies,
And that seek him with the whole heart.
³ They also do no iniquity:
They walk in his ways.

When we come to verse 63, the psalmist tells us of the communal nature of his pursuit. “I am a companion of all them that fear thee, and of them that keep thy precepts.” Thus, we are introduced, briefly, to the psalmist’s horizontal relationship with other ‘kindred spirits.’ There are three primary descriptive terms he uses in this psalm to characterize that relationship: companionship, rejoicing, and dependence.⁵⁶² In this middle verse we see the occasion, the response and the reason for that rejoicing.

Occasion: “When they see me” For all our desire to control our lives through planning; random encounters are still the norm in much of them. But what seem chance encounters to us are not so to the Most High God. His loving providence never ceases working on our behalf. “My Father worketh hitherto, and I work.”⁵⁶³ Even those densely clustered and unplanned events that we lump together under the rubric “chaos”, are not so with God. God is not trapped in the whirlwind of His making. Furthermore, we do well to consider that the nature of divine providence argues that all chance or planned encounters in our lives have a divine reason and purpose lying behind them which, though we do not grasp, are nevertheless accomplished. The hand of God (☩ JOD) is operative not only in forming our spiritual lives but in bringing people together for His purposes and our blessing. Here in the psalmist’s life, as in our own, simply encountering another kindred spirit can serve to comfort, inspire, enlighten,

⁵⁶² Psalm 119 **Companionship:** (63) “I am a companion of all them that fear thee, and of them that keep thy precepts.” **Rejoicing:** (74) They that fear thee will be glad when they see me; because I have hoped in thy word. **Dependence:** (79) “Let those that fear thee turn unto me, and those that have known thy testimonies.

⁵⁶³ The passage is taken from the story of the healing of the crippled man lying at the pool of Bethesda in John 5:1-18. He was told to take up his bed and walk on the Sabbath, a fact that eventually led the Jews to Jesus who told them “My Father worketh hitherto, and I work”; an assertion that only further enflamed their murderous anger.

guide, help, protect, or enable a host of other providential beneficences in the lives of people without our planning or our knowledge.

Response: “They that fear thee will be glad.” It is wonderful to reflect on the revelatory nature of anticipated or chance encounters with those we love. There is a sudden delight to see or to hear from them. Clapping in delight, embraces, smiles, and many other expressions of joy grow from such events. How many times, as we numbly searched the faces of passing strangers, have our hearts leapt for joy at the sudden sight of a loved one whom we were to meet or whom we chanced upon in a crowded city? But there is more than mutual love that lies at the root of this joy. Such encounters inevitably occasion meaningful conversation; which one can hardly equate with the superficial “Hi, how are you?” of two acquaintances who pass each other but do not even wait for an answer to the *pro forma* question of polite but trite civility. Malachi tells us of very different encounters and the Divine awareness and purpose attendant upon their discourse.

“Then they that feared the LORD spoke often one to another: and the LORD hearkened, and heard it, and a book of remembrance was written before him for them that feared the LORD, and that thought upon his name. ‘And they shall be mine’, saith the LORD of hosts, ‘in that day when I make up my jewels; and I will spare them, as a man spares his own son that serves him.’”

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Chance encounters enable fellowship⁵⁶⁵ and fellowship with kindred spirits is a great joy and encouragement for them. Just as Malachi describes God’s actions and purpose in response to the meetings and discourses of those who fear His name, think on Him and speak often to one another; so, the psalmist tells us why those that fear the LORD will be glad when they see him.

Reason: “Because I have hoped in thy word” In the community of those “who fear the LORD”, no individual activity is isolated from others. The psalmist tells us of his spiritual exercise: “I have hoped in thy word.” This is not just ‘whistling a happy tune in the dark.’ The psalmist has known real affliction. The proud have forged a lie against him in a vain attempt to alienate him from those who feared the LORD but he determined keep the LORD’s precepts with his whole heart. (69) The wicked sought to trammel his will, to bind him with ropes, but he refused to forget God’s law. (61) Through all his suffering and affliction, what sustained him? Clearly, he tells us that it was his hope in God’s word. The value of the psalmist’s conversation and fellowship lies in its experiential nature. It is what he has proven in his life that is beneficial to those he meets. Each believer is a gift of the Spirit to all the others. Each person in the fellowship of Christ has a place in the community. Each person experiences God’s

⁵⁶⁴ Malachi 3:16-17

⁵⁶⁵ The New Testament word for fellowship is *κοινωνία* (pronounced *koy-nohn-ee'-ah*) from *κοινωνος* (pronounced *koy-no-nos'*) a sharer or a companion

(often painful) formation of their spiritual life.⁵⁶⁶ Their individual conversations are part of the common union (or communion). What unites them is shared faith in the truth, but not truth in the abstract. For each believer their experience of God's Word of Truth has not only transformed their lives but enabled them to love one another. Hence the conversation which supports the common faith is one centered in the truth spoken in love that others "...may grow up into him in all things, which is the head, even Christ: from whom the whole body fitly joined together and compacted by that which every joint supplieth, according to the effectual working in the measure of every part, maketh increase of the body unto the edifying of itself in love."⁵⁶⁷

Comfort in Affliction

⁷⁵ I know, O LORD, that thy judgments are right,
And that thou in faithfulness hast afflicted me.

⁷⁶ Let, I pray thee, thy merciful kindness be for my comfort,
According to thy word unto thy servant.



These two verses bring into view two divine *Modus Operandi* that are very different: affliction that is the result of God's just judgments (75) and comfort that is the result of His merciful kindness (76). In themselves judgment and mercy seem contradistinctive. In his epistle, James tells us that "mercy rejoiceth against judgment."⁵⁶⁸ Even though mercy and judgment; affliction and comfort seem to be on opposite ends of God's dealings with humans, these verses suggest that they are both part of the same spectrum and not fundamentally irreconcilable. God's faithfulness which is demonstrated by His affliction of the psalmist is completely compatible with his merciful kindness which is demonstrated in His use of comfort in the psalmist's affliction. The psalmist has told us as much. "This is my comfort in my affliction: for thy

⁵⁶⁶ 1 Corinthians 12:4 - 6 Now, there are diversities of gifts, but the same Spirit. And there are differences of administrations, but the same Lord. And there are diversities of operations, but it is the same God which worketh all in all.

⁵⁶⁷ Ephesians 4:15 - 16

⁵⁶⁸ James 2:11 - 13 "For he that said, Do not commit adultery, said also, Do not kill. Now if thou commit no adultery, yet if thou kill, thou art become a transgressor of the law. So speak ye, and so do, as they that shall be judged by the law of liberty. For he shall have judgment without mercy, that hath showed no mercy; and **mercy rejoiceth against** (κατακαυχασθαι to exult against) **judgment.**"

James refers to the Law of Moses (the Decalogue) only to demonstrate the general principle that a person who breaks any commandment is exposed as a law breaker regardless of which law was broken because the Law giver is One. But James is not writing to the Jew (who will be judged by the law of Moses) or the heathen (who will be judged by the law of nature as noted in Romans 1:20 "For the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and Godhead; so that they are without excuse..."). James is speaking to Christians who will be judged by the "law of liberty" i.e. the Gospel, the heart of which is still focused on loving one's neighbor as one's self and typically involves showing mercy to the offending neighbor as God for Christ's sake has forgiven us. "And be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you." (Ephesians 4:32) If therefore our treatment of our neighbor involves no show of mercy, then the "law of liberty" that has empowered us to love our neighbor will be our very real condemnation. This is the whole point of the parable in Matthew 18:22-35 of the king and his forgiven but unforgiving debtor. Jesus told the parable in answer to Peter's question "how oft shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? Till seven times?" The parable underscored Jesus' answer, "Until seventy times seven."

word hath quickened me.”⁵⁶⁹ The prophet Hosea also tells us of this. “Come, and let us return unto the LORD: for he hath torn, and he will heal us; he hath smitten, and he will bind us up. After two days will he revive us: in the third day he will raise us up, and we shall live in his sight.”⁵⁷⁰ God tears and God heals. He smites and He binds up. He destroys the temple and He rebuilds it. He exiles His people and He brings them back. He afflicts the psalmist and He comforts him in that very affliction. The severity and the goodness of God’s dealings with His people point to the presence of the corruption of sin. But their connectedness points to the common motivation of His love.

Verse 75b completes the trilogy on the subject of affliction.⁵⁷¹ If we trace the theme of affliction in these three verses, a unified picture emerges. There is (1) the psalmist’s **confession of sin** “Before I was afflicted I went astray.” There is (2) the psalmist’s **testimony of answered prayer**. Twice he prayed “teach me thy statutes; first on the basis of God’s mercy and then on the basis of God’s goodness. God has answered that prayer. “It is good for me that I have been afflicted; that I might learn thy statutes.” There is (3) The Psalmist’s **recognition of God’s faithfulness**: “thou in faithfulness hast afflicted me.” Finally, there is (4) His **new found obedience** “... but now have I kept thy word.”

The issue in these verses is not the illumination of the mind, but the deliverance of the will. When that warfare, that deliverance from bondage has been accomplished, then comfort is in order. “Comfort ye, comfort ye my people, saith your God. Speak ye comfortably to Jerusalem, and cry unto her, that her warfare is accomplished, that her iniquity is pardoned: for she hath received of the LORD’S hand double for all her sins.”⁵⁷²

But it is interesting to note that the psalmist does not stop praying at this point. He now prays for God to permit comfort to come to him. “Let, I pray thee, thy merciful kindness be for my comfort.” This is the first of five related prayers that request that God permit (or “let”) that which is petitioned. As such, they are all addressed to the hand (ׁ - JOD) of God. One has the picture that the hand of God has been heavy on the soul of the psalmist and now he is asking that God lift His mighty hand and use it in a different way, that His hand assume a different role: that of permitting blessings to flow once again “according to thy word unto thy servant” (i.e. according to His promises). His prayer finds its source in the realization that God is the only possible source of real and lasting comfort. When world-lings suffer adversity, they too look for comfort. The need for comfort in suffering is only human. But how many are the false springs of earthly

⁵⁶⁹ Psalm 119:50

⁵⁷⁰ Hosea 6:1 - 2

⁵⁷¹ Psalm 119:67 “Before I was afflicted I went astray: but now have I kept thy word.”

Psalm 119:71 “It is good for me that I have been afflicted; that I might learn thy statutes.”

Psalm 119:75 “I know, O LORD, that thy judgments are right, and that thou in faithfulness hast afflicted me.”

⁵⁷² Isaiah 40:1 - 2

consolation: wealth, possessions, praise of men, validation by others of our problem denial, the distraction of amusement, alcohol, drugs; the list is long. These all are but patches on an unhealed wound. They do us no good spiritually. But the comfort of God, given in His word, when rightly applied, tends to further and secure that beneficence for which He first inflicted suffering. If the LORD tears, it is He who must heal. If the LORD smites, it is He who must bind up. If the LORD destroys the temple, it is He who must order its rebuilding. If the LORD exiles His people, it is He who must bring them back. To seek for comfort from God's affliction from sources other than God is to run out of His classroom before the teaching is over and the lesson is learned.

Finally, there is the notion of time that underlies these two verses. Verse 75 looks backward in time. "Thou in faithfulness hast afflicted me." Verse 76 is a prayer in the present that looks forward to a future answer. "Let, I pray thee, thy merciful kindness be for my comfort." The storm of judgment has passed, but the sun of merciful kindness has not yet come out. The psalmist waits patiently in anticipation of this second manifestation of God's love for him that will confirm that he is truly "thy servant." These verses comprehend a time similar to that time between the crucifixion and the resurrection of our Lord Jesus. What an opportunity for faith to rejoice in the darkness of the present moment.

Loving Life

⁷⁷ Let thy tender mercies come unto me,
That I may live: for thy law is my delight.



This is the second of the five interrelated petitions of this octave. They are for comfort (76), life (77), justice (78), fellowship (79), and integrity (80). We may observe four aspects to this second plea: 1) its means of fulfillment – "let thy tender mercies ...", 2) its personal nature – "... come unto me", 3) its desired end – "that I may live", and 4) its justification – "for thy law is my delight."

Let thy tender mercies ... : hovering under this entire psalm is the psalmist's awareness that he is a sinner who has not kept the very law that he claims to love. Like the psalmist, the Apostle Paul delights in the law of God but he knows that he is trapped. "...I delight in the law of God after the inward man. But I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members. O wretched man that I am! Who shall deliver me from the body of this death?" ⁵⁷³ Both men know that they desperately need God's mercy. This awareness does not indicate a hypocritical petition. Rather it represents the

⁵⁷³ Romans 7:22 - 24

ongoing heart cry of one who feels the entrapment of his will and who desires above all else to be free from sin and free to serve God.

If we mark narrowly we shall find that David here seeks another sort of mercy than he sought before. For first he sought mercy to forgive his sins; then he sought mercy to comfort him in his troubles; now he seeks mercy to live, and sin no more. Alas, many seek the first mercy, of remission; and the second mercy, of consolation in trouble, who are altogether careless of the third mercy, to live well. It is a great mercy of God to amend thy life: where this is not, let no man think he hath received either of the former. It is a great mercy of God, which not only pardons evil that is done, but strengthens us also to further good that we have not done; and this is the mercy which here David seeks.

--William Cowper.

... come unto me: This is not a communal prayer. It is a personal prayer. And it could not be otherwise. Happiness (as well as sorrow) is always experienced on the individual level. There may be those who share our joy (as well as our grief) but the experience of these is always intensely personal. And the bliss of communion with the LORD is also experienced on the personal level. Relationship with God is irreducibly personal even when it is experienced collectively in the same place and at the same time as part of a community. Repentance, faith, hope, and love (indeed all virtues of the spiritual life) are unavoidably individual and personal. Love may bind a community together but it is always the love of one individual for another.

That I might live: This petition for life is not merely talking about physical life. It addresses life in God. In one sense all living things live “in God.” The apostle tells us as much. “For in him we live, and move, and have our being; as certain also of your own poets have said, for we are also his offspring.”⁵⁷⁴ But there is a difference between existing in the presence of the omnipresent One and having actual intercourse with Him. When the psalmist pleads: “Let thy tender mercies come unto me that I may live”, he is pleading for an intelligent and fulfilling communion with the LORD, a sound relationship.

... for thy law is my delight: This assertion of personal delight is not that of a legalist, but rather the evidence of one who deeply loves God. In this passage the term “law” means much more than just a set of statutes. It is “Torah” or teaching. And the delight in being taught implies the love of the teacher. But the love of teaching also means the love of learning – specifically learning about God. Jesus’ entire earthly sojourn may be understood in terms of that lesson. “He that hath seen me hath seen the Father.”⁵⁷⁵

⁵⁷⁴ Acts 17:28

⁵⁷⁵ John 14:8 - 11 “Philip saith unto him, ‘Lord, shew us the Father, and it suffices us.’ Jesus saith unto him, ‘Have I been so long time with you, and yet hast thou not known me, Philip? He that hath seen me hath seen the Father; and how sayest thou then, Shew us the Father? Believest thou not that I am in the Father, and the Father in me? The words that I speak unto you I speak not of

Linking life to learning also suggests that one of the greatest delights of the spiritual person is to spend their entire lifetime learning about God. Their endless praise of His manifest excellencies and declaration of His inherent worthiness do now and will eternally rest upon that ongoing joyous discovery of the character of His Person.

The law also implies governance, and governance the kingdom of God. The prayer that Jesus teaches His disciples includes the petition “Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven.”⁵⁷⁶ The psalmist wants to live in God’s kingdom, not just as a ‘fire escape’ from divine judgment, but rather as a place of supreme happiness in beholding God in His glory. God, himself, shares that desire. “Father, I will that they also, whom thou hast given me, be with me where I am; that they may behold my glory, which thou hast given me: for thou lovedst me before the foundation of the world.”⁵⁷⁷

Seeking Justice

⁷⁸ Let the proud be ashamed;
For they dealt perversely with me without a cause:
But I will meditate in thy precepts.



The third petition of this octave relates to justice. In this verse we may observe 1) the judgment requested, 2) the reason for that request, and 3) the ongoing actions of the psalmist.

1) The judgment requested answers exactly to the character of the offender. זָד (zade') means arrogant, seething with malevolence, self-assured. בּוֹשׁ (boosh) means to pale in pallor, to be confused, to be disappointed. The judgment requested is like asking that all the steam be released with a whoosh from a train that had a full head up so that it will now sit powerless on the rails and go nowhere.

2) The reason for this request lies in the evidence of their offense as cited throughout this psalm. They expressed their hostility to the psalmist in their actions against him. Four times in this psalm the psalmist describes the work of the proud. The proud have had the psalmist greatly in derision (51a), have forged a lie against him (69a), have dug unlawful pits for him (85a), and have tried to oppress him (122b). Despite all their malevolence, the psalmist has not declined from God’s law (51b), but has kept God’s precepts with his whole heart (69b) while they “err from thy commandments” (21b).⁵⁷⁸ Given the contrast between their actions and his own, the

myself: but the Father that dwelleth in me, he doeth the works. Believe me that I am in the Father, and the Father in me: or else believe me for the very works' sake.”

⁵⁷⁶ Matthew 6:10

⁵⁷⁷ John 17:24

⁵⁷⁸ Psalm 119: (21) “Thou hast rebuked the proud that are cursed, which do err from thy commandments.” (51) “The proud have had me greatly in derision: yet have I not declined from thy law.” (69) “The proud have forged a lie against me: but I will keep thy

psalmist concludes that their behavior is perverse and without a (just) cause. There is nothing in the psalmist's actions that would justify their treatment of him. There is a cause for their behavior, of course. It lies in their sinful disposition. They are proud. In all pride there is hostility to God, aversion to His governance, and animosity toward His people. Jesus was well aware of this situation when He told His disciples, "In the world ye shall have tribulation."⁵⁷⁹

3) What is of particular importance to the believer, as we read this verse, lies in the psalmist's description of his ongoing actions in the face of the machinations of the proud. Despite their perverse attempts at mockery, falsehood, entrapment, and oppression; the psalmist has resolved to "meditate in thy precepts." There is a real danger for the servant of the LORD in the works of evil going on around him. While evil may cause harm to the externals of his life (health, possessions, reputation, communal unity, etc.), it can only impact the spiritual life by means of the individual's permission. Each manifestation of malevolence petitions the mind of the victim for consideration of that which is not God. If wrong has been done to us, it is our responsibility not to allow our minds to brood on it. Certainly, any offense must be recognized as such, just as the psalmist does here when he says the proud have dealt perversely with him without a cause. But his response is two-fold, first he recognizes the offense sufficiently to commit the matter to God intelligently, and second he resolves to "meditate in thy precepts" (i.e. to choose to go on thinking about how God thinks). Had the psalmist allowed his hurt feelings to govern his thinking; had he started to brood over the offense and not let it go into God's hands; he would have gone from a proper longing for justice to a very inappropriate longing for vengeance. It is this latter desire against which God (through Paul) warns us. "Dearly beloved, avenge not yourselves, but rather give place unto wrath: for it is written, Vengeance is mine; I will repay, saith the Lord. ... Be not overcome of evil, but overcome evil with good."⁵⁸⁰ The

precepts with my whole heart." (78) "Let the proud be ashamed; for they dealt perversely with me without a cause: but I will meditate in thy precepts." (85) "The proud have digged pits for me, which are not after thy law." (122) "Be surety for thy servant for good: let not the proud oppress me."

⁵⁷⁹ John 16:33 These things I have spoken unto you, that in me ye might have peace. In the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world.

⁵⁸⁰ Romans 12:19, 21

Dearly beloved, avenge not yourselves] Ye are the children of God, and he loves you; and because he loves you he will permit nothing to be done to you that he will not turn to your advantage. Never take the execution of the law into your own hands; rather suffer injuries. The Son of man is come, not to destroy men's lives, but to save: be of the same spirit. When he was reviled, he reviled not again. It is the part of a noble mind to bear up under unmerited disgrace; little minds are litigious and quarrelsome.

Give place unto wrath] *δοτε τοπον τη οργη*. Leave room for the civil magistrate to do his duty, he holds the sword for this purpose; and if he be unfaithful to the trust reposed in him by the state, leave the matter to God, who is the righteous judge: for by avenging yourselves you take your cause both out of the hands of the civil magistrate and out of the hands of God. I believe this to be the meaning of give place to wrath, *οργη*, punishment; the penalty which the law, properly executed, will inflict." Eccl. 19:17: Admonish thy neighbor before thou threaten him, and, not being, angry, GIVE PLACE TO THE LAW OF THE MOST HIGH.

early life of the church was marked by much violent persecution just as Jesus warned. It persists today in many forms. But the guidance is ever the same:

“For this is thankworthy, if a man, for conscience toward God, endures grief, suffering wrongfully. For what glory is it, if, when ye be buffeted for your faults, ye shall take it patiently? But if, when ye do well, and suffer for it, ye take it patiently, this is acceptable with God. For even hereunto were ye called: because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that ye should follow his steps: Who did no sin, neither was guile found in his mouth: Who, when he was reviled, reviled not again; when he suffered, he threatened not; but committed himself to him that judges righteously: Who his own self bare our sins in his own body on the tree, that we, being dead to sins, should live unto righteousness: by whose stripes ye were healed.” ⁵⁸¹

Seeking Community

⁷⁹ Let those that fear thee turn unto me,
And those that have known thy testimonies



The fourth petition of this octave relates to community. The petition is simple. He asks that the members of the community (which he describes as ‘those that fear thee’) “turn unto me.” The petition hints that the psalmist felt spiritually ostracized by them. Was this because of the derision that the proud had directed at him,⁵⁸² who had forged a lie against him,⁵⁸³ and had dealt perversely with him without a cause?⁵⁸⁴ Had those who were his companions⁵⁸⁵ turned away from him because of his affliction, or because they believed the lies and mockery of the proud who sought to draw them away in order to rob him⁵⁸⁶ of fellowship? Or was it for some moral fault for which he had sought the LORD’s mercy? Was it a sin of the psalmist or was it just the work of wicked and proud people who sought to spread division among God’s people? It is not clear what lies at

Vengeance is mine] This fixes the meaning of the apostle, and at once shows that the exhortation, Rather give place to wrath or punishment, means, Leave the matter to the judgment of God; it is his law that in this case is broken; and to him the infliction of deserved punishment belongs. Some think it means, "Yield a little to a man when in a violent passion, for the sake of peace, until he grow cooler."

I will repay] In my own time and in my own way. But he gives the sinner space to repent, and this longsuffering leads to salvation. Dr. Taylor, after Dr. Benson, conjectures that the apostle in these directions had his eye upon the indignities which the Jews, and probably the Christians too, (for they were often confounded by the heathen,) suffered by the edict of Claudius, mentioned Ac 18:2, which "commanded all Jews to depart from Rome." Upon this occasion Aquila and Priscilla removed to Corinth, where Paul found them, and dwelt with them a considerable time. No doubt they gave him a full account of the state of the Christian Church at Rome, and of every thing relating to the late persecution under Claudius. That emperor's edict probably died with him, if it were not repealed before, and then the Jews and Christians (if the Christians were also expelled) returned again to Rome; for Aquila and Priscilla were there when Paul wrote this epistle, Ro 16:3, which was in the fourth year of Nero, successor to Claudius.

- Adam Clark's Commentary on Romans 12:19

⁵⁸¹ 1 Peter 2:19 - 24

⁵⁸² Psalm 119:51 The proud have had me greatly in derision: yet have I not declined from thy law.

⁵⁸³ Psalm 119:69 The proud have forged a lie against me: but I will keep thy precepts with my whole heart.

⁵⁸⁴ Psalm 119:78 Let the proud be ashamed; for they dealt perversely with me without a cause: but I will meditate in thy precepts.

⁵⁸⁵ Psalm 119:63 I am a companion of all them that fear thee, and of them that keep thy precepts.

⁵⁸⁶ Psalm 119:61 The bands of the wicked have robbed me: but I have not forgotten thy law.

the root of the alienation suggested in this verse. Whatever the reason, the pain the psalmist feels at being forsaken by those whom he loves lays just below the surface of this verse. What can be said about the interplay between the psalmist and the community is that his desire for a happy or harmonious relationship with them is comparable to that which he desired with God

Was it sin? If the root of the psalmist's rejection was some sin or moral failure in the psalmist, then the turning away of the community serves as a very real barometer of the state of the psalmist's relationship with God. Sin persisted in can destroy human relationships. But early on, sin has a tendency to alienate the godly from a sinner. This was the case with the apostle Paul in writing to the church at Corinth. They had in their midst one whose sexual impropriety should have occasioned scandal and alienation but did not, so Paul wrote to the carnal believers as follows:

"It is reported commonly that there is fornication among you, and such fornication as is not so much as named among the Gentiles, that one should have his father's wife. And ye are puffed up, and have not rather mourned, that he that hath done this deed might be taken away from among you. For I verily, as absent in body, but present in spirit, have judged already, as though I were present, concerning him that hath so done this deed, In the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, when ye are gathered together, and my spirit, with the power of our Lord Jesus Christ, to deliver such an one unto Satan for the destruction of the flesh, that the spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus. Your glorying is not good. Know ye not that a little leaven leaveneth the whole lump?

*Purge out therefore the old leaven, that ye may be a new lump, as ye are unleavened. For even Christ our passover is sacrificed for us: Therefore let us keep the feast, not with old leaven, neither with the leaven of malice and wickedness; but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth."*⁵⁸⁷

Evidently the church heeded Paul's rebuke and dealt with the offender so severely that Paul had to temper their zeal in his second letter,

*"But if any have caused grief, he hath not grieved me, but in part: that I may not overcharge you all. Sufficient to such a man is this punishment, which was inflicted of many. So that contrariwise ye ought rather to forgive him, and comfort him, lest perhaps such a one should be swallowed up with overmuch sorrow. Wherefore I beseech you that ye would confirm your love toward him. For to this end also did I write, that I might know the proof of you, whether ye be obedient in all things. To whom ye forgive any thing, I forgive also: for if I forgave anything, to whom I forgave it, for your sakes forgave I it in the person of Christ; Lest Satan should get an advantage of us: for we are not ignorant of his devices."*⁵⁸⁸

⁵⁸⁷ 1 Corinthians 5:1 - 9

⁵⁸⁸ 2 Corinthians 2:5 -11

When the community of believers deals with a member's sin, there is clearly a balance to be maintained between discipline and division. Punishment persisted in and refusal to forgive when repentance is manifest breeds division. Clearly fellowship can be a powerful tool both by way of deprivation of fellowship (the stick) and by way of the comfort of fellowship (the carrot). Properly used, both can profoundly encourage a godly way of life. And God, by means of a godly community can use both.

Was it Satan? The closing point which Paul makes (above) about Satan's devices to gain an advantage hints at another possibility for the psalmist's suffering. Alienation is not always the result of sin. Sometimes godly people can be abandoned by otherwise righteous people who gullibly believe the reports of the wicked. Their course of action may seem righteous, but it is really self-righteous. It is the spirit of division that is often mistaken for godly separation. It is the spirit of division that says, "Stand by thyself, come not near to me; for I am holier than thou." God assures us that such as "these are a smoke in my nose, a fire that burneth all the day."⁵⁸⁹ In this a case, it is not the sufferer who needs to repent, but the community. It is they who must turn about (or repent) of their folly of believing lies told by jealous adversaries in order to impugn the reputation of godly individuals. Since the psalmist pleads that the community turn unto him, this may be the actual case. If that is so, then it is remarkable that the psalmist prays for their repentance just as Job once did for his miserable "comforters"⁵⁹⁰

The ambiguity of the situation in this verse should be a real warning not to judge anyone, but to constantly be in prayer that God would give insight into the actual matters so that we "Judge not according to the appearance, but judge righteous judgment."⁵⁹¹

The Value of Integrity

⁸⁰ Let my heart be sound in thy statutes;
That I be not ashamed.



The fifth and last petition of this octave relates to integrity. In this verse, the relational focus has shifted from the proud (78) and from the community (79) back to the psalmist's relationship with the LORD. The integrity spoken of here is not integrity on the level of behavior. The criterion for behavioral integrity is that private actions or speech align well with public actions or speech. But such a view of integrity argues that the community is the judge. The psalmist here pleads for heart integrity because he knows that he must ultimately deal with God and that His insight in judgment is far

⁵⁸⁹ Isaiah 65:5

⁵⁹⁰ Job 42:10 And the LORD turned the captivity of Job, when he prayed for his friends: also the LORD gave Job twice as much as he had before.

⁵⁹¹ John 7:24

deeper than that of the community, “for the LORD seeth not as man seeth; for man looketh on the outward appearance, but the LORD looketh on the heart.”⁵⁹² The integrity that the psalmist pleads for therefore involves interior oneness of thought, feeling, and will in obedient conformity to God’s governance as revealed in the statutes. The reason for this petition (“that I be not ashamed”) is in stark contrast to the petition of verse 78a (“Let the proud be ashamed”). The psalmist utters this prayer because, unlike the proud who have “dealt perversely with me without a cause”, he does not want to pale in pallor or be confused, or be disappointed when he stands before the LORD. The integrity for which he pleads cannot be the work of the psalmist. Rather it must be the work of God in his life. He knows that the judgment of God is directed against what the hand of God has not wrought. At least two characteristics cohere in oneness of heart: stability, and virtue.

Heart Oneness and Stability: James tells us that “A double minded man is unstable in all his ways”⁵⁹³ He also gives a word of correction, “purify your hearts, ye double minded.”⁵⁹⁴ What James is saying is that double-mindedness is the very thing our Lord Jesus warns us against, when He says that “no man can serve two masters”⁵⁹⁵ God would have our undivided allegiance to His kingdom, not our own. To seek to serve God and self is impossible. That is why that Jesus applies the dictum on two masters as follows:

*“Therefore I say unto you, Take no thought for your life, what ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink; nor yet for your body, what ye shall put on. Is not the life more than meat, and the body than raiment? Behold the fowls of the air: for they sow not, neither do they reap, nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feedeth them. Are ye not much better than they?”*⁵⁹⁶

Clearly trust in God’s kind and providential care is central to single-minded service to Him. And that trust is part of love, a love which unifies the human personality. Love also includes desire and desire influences the direction of our vision. Again, in the same context Jesus teaches:

⁵⁹² 1 Samuel 16:7 “But the LORD said unto Samuel, ‘Look not on his countenance, or on the height of his stature; because I have refused him: for the LORD seeth not as man seeth; for man looketh on the outward appearance, but the LORD looketh on the heart.’”

⁵⁹³ James 1:5-8 “If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him. But let him ask in faith, nothing wavering. For he that wavereth is like a wave of the sea driven with the wind and tossed. For let not that man think that he shall receive any thing of the Lord. A double minded man is unstable in all his ways.”

⁵⁹⁴ James 4:8 Draw nigh to God, and he will draw nigh to you. Cleanse your hands, ye sinners; and purify your hearts, ye double minded.

⁵⁹⁵ Matthew 6:24 -26 “No man can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon. Therefore I say unto you, Take no thought for your life, what ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink; nor yet for your body, what ye shall put on. Is not the life more than meat, and the body than raiment? Behold the fowls of the air: for they sow not, neither do they reap, nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feedeth them. Are ye not much better than they?”

⁵⁹⁶ Matthew 6:24 -26 (ibid)

“But lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through nor steal: For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also. The light of the body is the eye: if therefore thine eye be single, thy whole body shall be full of light. But if thine eye be evil, thy whole body shall be full of darkness. If therefore the light that is in thee be darkness, how great is that darkness!” ⁵⁹⁷

The stability of movement which is the direct result of the fixedness of the human gaze is parabolic of the spiritual life. *“Rope-dancers, in order to steady themselves, fix the eye on some object on the wall, and look steadily at that. If they should look down on the rope or the people, they would become dizzy and fall. A man crossing a stream on a log, if he will look across at some object steadily, will be in little danger. If he looks down on the dashing and rolling waters, he will become dizzy, and fall. So, Jesus says, in order that the conduct may be right, it is important to fix the affections on heaven. Having the affections there--having the eye of faith single, steady, unwavering--all the conduct will be correspondent.”* ⁵⁹⁸

Heart Oneness and Virtue: The English word virtue comes from the Latin *vir* (man) and its related word *virtus* (valor, manliness, strength). It is the same as the Greek *αρρην* (arrhen - man) and its related word *αρετη* (arête - valor, manliness, or strength). Peter advises the believer to “add to your faith virtue (*αρετη* arête)” ⁵⁹⁹ The basis for Peter’s admonition lies in his assertion that grace and peace have been multiplied unto us through the knowledge of God, and of Jesus our Lord. And, as part of that grace and peace, we have been given all things that pertain unto life and godliness, through the knowledge of him that hath called us to glory and virtue (*αρετη* arête). Instrumental in that calling is the receipt of “exceeding great and precious promises: that by these ye might be partakers of the divine nature.” ⁶⁰⁰ Based on what Peter tells us, then, we may validly infer that the oneness of heart for which the psalmist pleads is akin to the oneness of God, Himself. In seeking integrity of heart, the psalmist is actually asking that his inner nature be transformed so that he might be a partaker of the divine nature (not in essence but in character) just as Peter suggests we can be partakers of the nature through the appropriation of the divine promises that are given to us for that purpose. And two characteristics of godliness that shine brightly in heart soundness are stability and strength.

⁵⁹⁷ Matthew 6:20 - 23

⁵⁹⁸ Albert Barnes Commentary on Matthew 6:22-23

⁵⁹⁹ 2 Peter 1:5 - 7 And beside this, giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue; and to virtue knowledge; and to knowledge temperance; and to temperance patience; and to patience godliness; and to godliness brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness charity.

⁶⁰⁰ 2 Peter 1:2 -4 “Grace and peace be multiplied unto you through the knowledge of God, and of Jesus our Lord, According as his divine power hath given unto us all things that pertain unto life and godliness, through the knowledge of him that hath called us to glory and virtue: Whereby are given unto us exceeding great and precious promises: that by these ye might be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust.

כ (CAPH)

☞ *The Psalmist Remonstrates with God* ☞

- 81 My soul fainteth for thy salvation:
But I hope in thy word.
- 82 Mine eyes fail for thy word, saying,
When wilt thou comfort me?
- 83 For I am become like a bottle in the smoke;
Yet do I not forget thy statutes.
- 84 How many are the days of thy servant?
When wilt thou execute judgment
on them that persecute me?

☞ *The Psalmist's Plight and Prayer* ☞

- 85 The proud have digged pits for me,
Which are not after thy law.
- 86 All thy commandments are faithful:
They persecute me wrongfully; help thou me.
- 87 They had almost consumed me upon earth;
But I forsook not thy precepts.
- 88 Quicken me after thy loving-kindness;
So shall I keep the testimony of thy mouth.



כ - Caph means the palm of the hand. Again, it is obvious that we are dealing with the Hand of God. In כ – teth, we considered the role of affliction as part of the process by which the ‘potter’ applies external pressure to shape the ‘pot’. In י – jod, the psalmist shifted the focus from himself as the pot, to the potter’s hand, the hand of God. He began that octave with the assertion: “Thy hands have made me and fashioned me (73a). Here, in כ - caph, the psalmist continues his meditation on the hand of God. There is a difference, however. י – jod refers to the hand of God closed upon the work, while כ – caph refers to the palm of the hand, an open hand. In י – jod we were introduced to the hand of God that can both afflict and comfort. In כ – caph the lifting up of the hand as a projection of authority is seen.⁶⁰¹ God’s hand is open here revealing the palm as an

⁶⁰¹ The sign of a hand lifted up, then as now, projects the authority to bind the will in an oath or the authority to forbid further progress. We see both instances in Ezekiel 20:4, 5, 14 – 16 where God chooses Israel and then refuses to permit the that generation of delivered Israelites to enter the Promised Land because of their disobedience and rebellion. “... Thus saith the Lord GOD; in the day when I chose Israel, and lifted up mine hand unto the seed of the house of Jacob, and made myself known unto them in the land of Egypt, when I lifted up mine hand unto them, saying, I am the LORD your God; in the day that I lifted up mine hand unto them, to bring them forth of the land of Egypt into a land that I had espied for them, flowing with milk and honey, which is the glory of all lands. ... But I wrought for my name's sake, that it should not be polluted before the heathen, in whose sight I brought them out. Yet also I lifted up my hand unto them in the wilderness, that I would not bring them into the land which I had given them, flowing

instrument for chastening and for comfort exploring the theme introduced in ' – jod. Although this psalm never once mentions chastening, it is clear that affliction, mentioned throughout, is roughly its equivalent.⁶⁰²

Like life itself, this octave is rife with suffering. In it we gain the most thorough picture of what it means to suffer.

- | | |
|--|---|
| 1. Profound depression | My soul fainteth for thy salvation (81) |
| 2. Weariness with life | Mine eyes fail for thy word (82) |
| 3. Vanity | I am become like a bottle in the smoke (83) |
| 4. Longing for Justice | When wilt thou execute judgment on them that persecute me? (84) |
| 5. Suffering injustice | The proud have digged (unlawful) pits for me. They persecute me wrongfully (85). |
| 6. Consumed almost to death ⁶⁰³ | They had almost consumed me upon earth (87) |
| 7. Impatience with God | “When wilt thou comfort me?” (82b) “How many are the days of thy servant?” “When wilt thou execute judgment on them that persecute me?” (84) |

One of Job’s “miserable comforters”, Eliphaz the Temanite, could say correctly, but unsympathetically: “Behold, happy is the man whom God correcteth: therefore, despise not thou the chastening of the Almighty: For he maketh sore, and bindeth up: he woundeth, and his hands make whole.”⁶⁰⁴ (i.e. He afflicts and He comforts) It is not easy to rejoice in suffering. As a matter of fact, it is impossible apart from God’s grace.

with milk and honey, which is the glory of all lands; because they despised my judgments, and walked not in my statutes, but polluted my Sabbaths: for their heart went after their idols.”

Abraham also makes use of the form of a hand raised in an oath when he says, “... to the king of Sodom, I have lift up mine hand unto the LORD, the most high God, the possessor of heaven and earth, that I will not take from a thread even to a shoe latchet, and that I will not take any thing that is thine, lest thou shouldst say, I have made Abram rich.” (Genesis 14:22, 23)

Job, also, in protesting his innocence pleads “If I have lifted up my hand against the fatherless, when I saw my help in the gate: Then let mine arm fall from my shoulder blade, and mine arm be broken from the bone.” (Job 31:21-22)

⁶⁰² If we look at the several references to affliction scattered throughout this psalm, we gain a coherent picture of the role that affliction plays in shaping the spiritual life, almost without commentary: “Thy word unto thy servant ... is my comfort in my affliction: for thy word hath quickened me (50). Before I was afflicted, I went astray: but now have I kept thy word (67). It is good for me that I have been afflicted; that I might learn thy statutes (71). I know, O LORD, that thy judgments are right, and that thou in faithfulness hast afflicted me (75). Unless thy law had been my delights, I should then have perished in mine affliction (92). I am afflicted very much: quicken me, O LORD, according unto thy word (107). Consider mine affliction, and deliver me: for I do not forget thy law (153).”

If we also look at the nexus of the psalmist’s comforts scattered throughout this psalm we find them all centered in God’s word: “This is my comfort in my affliction: for thy word hath quickened me (50). I remembered thy judgments of old, O LORD; and have comforted myself (52). Let, I pray thee, thy merciful kindness be for my comfort, according to thy word unto thy servant (76). Mine eyes fail for thy word, saying, When wilt thou comfort me?” (82)

⁶⁰³ We derive the extent of this state of affairs from the proximate request. “They had almost consumed me upon earth (87a) ... Quicken me after thy loving-kindness. (88a)” To consume someone is to kill them. In effect the psalmist is saying they have almost slain me in preparation for consuming all that is left of me. Please quicken me or revive me before they succeed in murdering me.

⁶⁰⁴ Job 5:17, 18

Nevertheless the writer to the Hebrews picks up the theme and tells us in what we should rejoice.

*“And ye have forgotten the exhortation which speaketh unto you as unto children, My son, despise not thou the chastening of the Lord, nor faint when thou art rebuked of him: For whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth. If ye endure chastening, God dealeth with you as with sons; for what son is he whom the father chasteneth not? But if ye be without chastisement, whereof all are partakers, then are ye bastards, and not sons. Furthermore, we have had fathers of our flesh which corrected us, and we gave them reverence: shall we not much rather be in subjection unto the Father of spirits, and live? For they verily for a few days chastened us after their own pleasure; but he for our profit, that we might be partakers of his holiness. Now no chastening for the present seems to be joyous, but grievous: nevertheless, afterward it yields the peaceable fruit of righteousness unto them which are exercised thereby. Wherefore lift up the hands which hang down, and the feeble knees; and make straight paths for your feet, lest that which is lame be turned out of the way; but let it rather be healed.”*⁶⁰⁵

Affliction that transforms the inner, spiritual life is from God and, as a testimony of God’s love and our secure relationship; as a promise of future fruitfulness and reward,⁶⁰⁶ there is room for rejoicing in suffering.

Like many in the psalms, the psalmist’s problem lies not with what he is suffering, but with the timing of the manifestation of the power of God to comfort the sufferer and to redress his grievances. In the first section of the octave, he remonstrates with God. “When wilt thou comfort me? (82b) How many are the days of thy servant? When wilt thou execute judgment on them that persecute me? (84)” The root of the impatience of the psalmist is exposed in the only actual two-part plea found in the second half of this octave: “Help thou me (86c) ... Quicken me after thy loving-kindness.” (88a) What the psalmist has been saying to God is essentially this: Unless You lift up your hand both to save me (81a) and judge those who wrongfully persecute me and who have caused me such distress (84b to 86), I will not be able to go on living. The days of thy servant shall have run out unless you help me by quickening me (*i.e. restoring my failing life*).

The Apostle Paul was familiar with this extreme of suffering when he wrote to the Corinthian church,

“And our hope of (i.e. for) you is steadfast, knowing, that as ye are partakers of the sufferings, so shall ye be also of the consolation. For we would not, brethren, have you ignorant of our trouble which came to us in Asia, that we were pressed out of measure, above strength, insomuch that

⁶⁰⁵ Hebrews 12:5-13

⁶⁰⁶ Matthew 5:11-12 Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake. Rejoice, and be exceeding glad: for great is your reward in heaven: for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you.

*we despaired even of life: But we had the sentence of death in ourselves, that we should not trust in ourselves, but in God which raiseth the dead.”*⁶⁰⁷

What Paul says in a few words is a very difficult lesson to learn, that the support of our spiritual life depends wholly on God’s mercy and grace for us and not at all on self motivated obedience (however halting or successful we have been). The psalmist protests that: “I hope in thy word. (81b) ... Mine eyes fail for thy word (82a) ... I forget not thy statutes (83b) ... I forsook not thy precepts. (87b)” But none of this is sufficient to raise the hand of God to say hold, enough. It is exceedingly difficult to learn to place no confidence in the workings of the flesh no matter how good they seem to us.⁶⁰⁸ The psalmist concludes, rightly so, that unless you “Quicken me after thy loving-kindness” I will never be able to “keep the testimony of thy mouth.”

Learning Patience

⁸¹ My soul fainteth for thy salvation:
but I hope in thy word.

⁸² Mine eyes fail for thy word, saying,
When wilt thou comfort me?



In the first verse of this octave, the psalmist tells us that he is about to faint spiritually while he waits for the salvation of God. In the second verse he tells us that he has been watching for the fulfillment of God’s promises to him for so long that his eyes are about to close in despair. The salvation he refers to is really deliverance from the suffering he is experiencing at that moment. It is not the eternal salvation from divine judgment and for eternal bliss in heaven, as we are accustomed to think of it. The psalmist is suffering and he wants the LORD to “execute judgment on them that persecute me” (84b). But he knows that God also has a hand in this suffering. “I know, O LORD, that thy judgments are right, and that thou in faithfulness hast afflicted me.” (75) Caph means a hand. In this octave, the psalmist continues his reflection on the Hand of God. Whereas Jod described the Hand of God closed upon the work (like a potter’s hand), Caph means the hand open revealing the palm of the hand. In this octave, we see that Hand of God open

⁶⁰⁷ 2 Corinthians 1:7-9

⁶⁰⁸ This ultimate repudiation of self-righteousness as worthless is presented by the Apostle Paul the remarkable autobiographical summation of his life before coming to faith in Jesus Christ written to the saints at Philippi: “Finally my brethren, rejoice in the Lord. To write the same things to you, to me indeed is not grievous, but for you it is safe. Beware of dogs, beware of evil workers, beware of the concision. For we are the circumcision, (i.e. the spiritual circumcision - those that have put away the workings of the flesh) which worship God in the spirit, and rejoice in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh; though I might also have confidence in the flesh. If any other man thinketh that he hath whereof he might trust in the flesh, I more: Circumcised the eighth day, of the stock of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, an Hebrew of the Hebrews; as touching the law, a Pharisee; concerning zeal, persecuting the church; touching the righteousness which is in the law, blameless. But what things were gain to me, those I counted loss for Christ. Yea doubtless, and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord: for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung, that I may win Christ.

in chastening and the psalmist pleading for that hand to be raised to end the affliction and to administer comfort. Although the psalmist only raises one question in these verses, (When?), there are really two questions that should be addressed at this point: why is the psalmist suffering and for how long will he suffer.

Why does the psalmist suffer here? The question might be raised as to why the psalmist returns to the subject of affliction when he has already dealt with it. He prayed that he might learn God's statutes (64 & 68). Before he learned the statutes, he had gone astray but God in faithfulness sent affliction to teach him those statutes (67 & 71). So why then does the psalmist continue in affliction? The deliverance long sought in this first verse really relates to the psalmist's prayer in the preceding verse, "Let my heart be sound in thy statutes; that I be not ashamed." (80). As noted, previously, heart soundness or integrity involves a single-minded confidence in God and not our self. The apostle Paul speaks of this dichotomy between God and our flesh when tells the Philippians that he is one who no longer places any confidence in the flesh.⁶⁰⁹ So why then is suffering necessary in relation to the psalmist's prayer for a sound heart? Suffering is not administered by the LORD to the lives of His servants without good purpose. James sets the whole matter before us thus: "My brethren, count it all joy when ye fall into divers temptations; knowing this, that the trying of your faith worketh patience. But let patience have her perfect work, that ye may be perfect and entire, wanting nothing."⁶¹⁰ It is the trial of one's faith in the furnace of affliction that not only purifies that faith, by removing selfish elements (no man can serve two masters) but accustoms the individual believer to the suffering involved in those sacrifices that further the Kingdom of God. It is the trial of the psalmist's faith that is at issue here, not disobedience and not unbelief. "I hope in thy word. Mine eyes fail for thy word." (81b, 82a)

Faith is of God. But faith must have its proper object in God, Himself. But that trial of faith which weans faith away from self toward God can be confusing. Among many things, the suffering of our Lord Jesus on the cross was a profoundly human experience.

⁶⁰⁹ Philippians 3:3 - 9 For we are the circumcision, which worship God in the spirit, and rejoice in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh. Though I might also have confidence in the flesh. If any other man thinketh that he hath whereof he might trust in the flesh, I more: Circumcised the eighth day, of the stock of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, an Hebrew of the Hebrews; as touching the law, a Pharisee; Concerning zeal, persecuting the church; touching the righteousness which is in the law, blameless. But what things were gain to me, those I counted loss for Christ. Yea doubtless, and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord: for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung, that I may win Christ, And be found in him, not having mine own righteousness, which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith:"

What the Apostle Paul is saying here is that he no longer places confidence in the keeping of the law by means of his own efforts. Rather he is of those who have put away the carnal or sinful nature, the flesh, in a spiritual operation of which the physical operation of circumcision speaks. Hence he has put off striving after all those ceremonial and self directed efforts at self justification with God (circumcision, birth, pharisaism, zealous persecutions of others, legal conformity) now have no meaning to him. Rather he now pursues Christ by faith as his hope of salvation by and righteousness before God.

⁶¹⁰ James 1:2-4

The unfathomable sufferings that He endured involved an element of human confusion regarding the purposes of the Father. This had already been profoundly articulated by the psalmist long before the event of which it spoke prophetically. "My God, my God, **why** hast thou forsaken me?"⁶¹¹ This is the cry not only of the Savior of the world, but of any faithful sufferer of such afflictions as the psalmist describes in this octave. It is this that James (in the passage on double mindedness) encourages a single-minded pursuit of: wisdom as a very real comfort in suffering. "If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him. But let him ask in faith, nothing wavering. For he that wavereth is like a wave of the sea driven with the wind and tossed. For let not that man think that he shall receive any thing of the Lord. A double minded man is unstable in all his ways."⁶¹²

How long will he suffer? We do well to remember, that the duration of suffering for godliness is tied to its purpose and the means by which the LORD achieves that purpose is tied to the nature of the problem being addressed. That purpose has two sides: the death of the old man (mortification, the end of self-trust or self-reliance) and the life of the new man (purgation as part of sanctification resulting in a singular trust in God alone). It is a work, as James points out, that has as its goal perfection or spiritual maturity. It is rather like pruning a vine to increase its fruitfulness.⁶¹³ In these verses, the psalmist's question relates to duration. He is saying, in effect, my soul is about to expire under this affliction, nevertheless I still hope in the word of your promise. But I have been looking for the fulfillment of your word for so long that my eyes are weary with watching, and are about to close in despair while I look for your answer. When will you fulfill your promise (ending this affliction) and comfort me instead? In human experience, suffering tends to make us keenly aware of passing time. When frightful events cause us the trauma of fear of life lost, moments are wont to seem like an eternity. But the duration of suffering relates to the rate at which the spiritual life proceeds. Spiritual growth, like organic growth, takes time. To fully esplanade a fruit tree takes many growing seasons. A bonsai tree can be cultivated for decades. As noted, to produce a supremely fruitful vine may take several seasons of pruning as well; hence the emphasis on patience in suffering. "Now no chastening for the present seemeth to be joyous, but grievous: nevertheless, afterward it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness unto them which are exercised thereby."⁶¹⁴

⁶¹¹ Psalm 22:1a

⁶¹² James 1:5 - 8

⁶¹³ John 15:1-2, 4-5, 8 "I am the true vine, and my Father is the husbandman. Every branch in me that beareth not fruit he taketh away: and every branch that beareth fruit, he purgeth it, that it may bring forth more fruit. ... Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine; no more can ye, except ye abide in me. I am the vine, ye are the branches: He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit: for without me ye can do nothing. ... Herein is my Father glorified, that ye bear much fruit; so shall ye be my disciples." Note that pruning has as its purpose the increase of fruition from fruit to more fruit to much fruit.

⁶¹⁴ Hebrews 12:11

The Miracle of Usefulness

- ⁸¹ My soul fainteth for thy salvation:
But I hope in thy word.
- ⁸² Mine eyes fail for thy word, saying,
When wilt thou comfort me?
- ⁸³ For I am become like a bottle in the smoke;
Yet do I not forget thy statutes.



Verse 83 presents the third aspect of the psalmist's plaint: "I am become like a bottle in the smoke." The two earlier complaints: "soul fainteth for thy salvation" and "mine eyes fail for thy word", are both fairly straight forward. But this last seems somewhat cryptic. The bottle spoken of is not the glass vessel that we are familiar with. Rather, it is a leather wine-skin. A bottle in the smoke refers to the effect that smoke (and the heat attendant on smoke) has on the skin. Smoke and heat dry the leather. In the case of a skin, this amounts to a premature aging of the skin rendering it brittle. In this environment, it is rapidly rendered useless because inelastic and brittle. Jesus makes reference to this when He says: "No man putteth a piece of new cloth unto an old garment, for that which is put in to fill it up taketh from the garment, and the rent is made worse. Neither do men put new wine into old bottles: else the bottles break, and the wine runneth out, and the bottles perish: but they put new wine into new bottles, and both are preserved."⁶¹⁵ The contrast in these two images is similar. Using new, unshrunk fabric to mend an old shrunken fabric and putting new wine in old wineskins both are counterproductive. In washing, the unequal shrinkage results in the patch pulling away and making the rent worse. Similarly, new wine in the process of ongoing fermentation produces carbon dioxide. The presence of the gas stretches the skin bag, which must be elastic. An old wine skin that has lost its elasticity and become brittle due to its contact with old wine will break, so both the wine and the wineskin are lost. The image here is one of the premature aging of the spiritual life of the psalmist. Against this background, his two-fold retort to God's apparent inactivity is that he still hopes in God's word and he has not forgotten God's statutes. That is, he has not broken and lost that which he contains. This last assertion is quite remarkable, even miraculous. While the psalmist is certainly near spiritual exhaustion (81a) as he awaits God's deliverance from them that persecute him (84b.), and while his eyes are about to close in despair as he looks for God's judgment to comfort him (82a), still he has not failed even though his spiritual resilience to ongoing persecution is aging him. Verse 84a picks up this theme of premature aging as the psalmist remonstrates with God, "How many are the days of thy servant?"

⁶¹⁵ Matthew 9:16 - 17

A dear friend of mine, who had suffered for many years under the terrible and unceasing pain of a damaged spine that had robbed him of much of life's activities that we take for granted, acquainted me with a profound truth that his suffering had taught him. Accomplishment, the simple act of doing something each day that we can look back on and take solace, comfort, and even satisfaction in is foundational to the well-being of our emotional lives. We may not be able to do all that we could wish to do, but at least we can do something. And that simple act of doing something brings hope and comfort at the end of a day. "She hath done what she could"⁶¹⁶ said Jesus in defense of the woman who "having an alabaster box of ointment of spikenard very precious; ... brake the box, and poured it on his head."⁶¹⁷ Even God takes note of the widow's mite or the cup of cold water. But what are we to say to ourselves when we are prevented from even these little activities and constrained to pass each day of our sojourn in complete inactivity because of paralyzing affliction or very old age? How are we to find comfort when we are become "like a bottle in the smoke" – useless for even the smallest good work?

I am sure that we have all experienced the light of a bonfire at night when the air is cold and the sky is clear. As we watch the flames ascend and the sparks fly upward, we notice that the stars, which normally shine in such profusion, are not so visible. It is not that they have vanished, but that we cannot see them because the light of the fire is so bright in comparison. But walk far away from the fire into the darkness of a field and look up. Those who sit by a fire do not see the stars because they cannot. But we see them because we are shrouded in a darkness that offers the stars faint light no competition, no light pollution to prevent our amazed gaze. There are lessons about God and human usefulness that can only be learned when we are become "like a bottle in the smoke." The very fact that the psalmist can say in the next breath "Yet do I not forget thy statutes" is an amazing testimony to God's grace operative in the enforced idleness of the suffering psalmist. What a fine wine-like treasure he still holds - this old and brittle wineskin. He should have cracked, but he has not. He can do nothing, yet still he waits, still he looks, still he prays. His faith has not failed; though it has been "tried with fire."⁴ It is a faith that will be found unto praise, honor and glory before the throne of God. And he like us will receive the reward of his fidelity "at the appearing of Jesus Christ:"⁶¹⁸ The usefulness, the accomplishment that underlies this passage is not the usefulness of activities wrought in the flesh, but the steadfastness of the spiritual life, pressed almost out of existence by affliction and yet sustained by the grace of God; a

⁶¹⁶ Mark 14:8

⁶¹⁷ Mark 14:3b

⁶¹⁸ 1 Peter 1:7 "That the trial of your faith, being much more precious than of gold that perisheth, though it be tried with fire, might be found unto praise and honour and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ:"

grace that lies all but hidden from the sufferer's view but not from God and those to whom He opens the mystery of His operations of grace through Jesus Christ, our Lord.

The Blessing of Grief

⁸⁴ How many are the days of thy servant?

When wilt thou execute judgment on them that persecute me?



This verse builds on the prayer in verse 78a: "Let the proud be ashamed; for they dealt perversely with me without a cause." That verse, as prayer, echoes the psalmist's longing for justice. This verse is part of a dialogue with God. The psalmist is impatient with suffering caused by God's 'delay' of justice. The comfort sought in verse 82b has not been received because justice has not been carried out speedily (84b). The rhetorical question that opens this verse is not the desire to know how many days are left in the psalmist's sojourn. The psalmist asks God to survey how this protracted affliction and the lack of the comfort of judgment are actually shortening his life. It is a very powerful argument and incredibly bold! He is saying (in effect) look at the number of days that you have appointed for my life. See how your delay in answering my prayer for justice is shortening them. Is that how you treat your servants? It is an echo of another theme in the psalms. "My strength is dried up like a potsherd; and my tongue cleaveth to my jaws; and thou hast brought me into the dust of death."⁶¹⁹

Considering our affective response to life as we experience it is sometimes quite important to our understanding of what God is doing. Jonah was so angry that God had spared Nineveh at the results of his preaching that he wanted to die. He hated the Ninevites because of what they had done to his people and wanted their destruction. Their destruction, in his reckoning, would have been just. But God is merciful and, far from being angry, was pleased at their profound repentance.⁶²⁰ Jesus' admonition to rejoice when we are persecuted⁶²¹ is jarring for the very fact that people do not necessarily rejoice in suffering, particularly if that suffering is at the hands of wrong doers. But a thorough understanding that God has chosen us to suffer as the prophets of old suffered, should serve as a basis for our rejoicing.

As we look at this verse, let us ponder what the affective state of the psalmist is besides the impatience already mentioned. The answer is obvious if we place ourselves in his

⁶¹⁹ Psalm 22:15

⁶²⁰ Jonah 4: 1-4, "But it displeased Jonah exceedingly, and he was very angry. And he prayed unto the LORD, and said, 'I pray thee, O LORD, was not this my saying, when I was yet in my country? Therefore I fled before unto Tarshish: for I knew that thou art a gracious God, and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness, and repentest thee of the evil. Therefore now, O LORD, take, I beseech thee, my life from me; for it is better for me to die than to live.'

⁶²¹ Matthew 5:11 - 12 "Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake. Rejoice, and be exceeding glad: for great is your reward in heaven: for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you."

sandals. First there is grief. For individuals who have a profound commitment to justice in human affairs, particularly their own, justice denied brings grief. It is a common expression to speak of bringing a legal suit against another as the 'redress of grievance.'⁶²² Grief is common enough in situations involving loss, particularly of those we love. It is one of the most difficult emotions to deal with because it can be so protracted. It may go on for years or even a lifetime in the case of the premature loss of a deeply loved son or daughter. But there is more. When it comes to grieving over injustice, grief is often accompanied by anger rooted in the pain of grief caused by the wrongdoing of others. We become angry because wrongdoers have hurt us. Anger is also exceedingly difficult to manage because it solicits the will to take immediate retaliation. If grieving over injustice can lead to a prayer for judgment, anger can prompt us to be vengeful. It is anger that is dangerous in the spiritual sense because God tells us very explicitly "Vengeance is mine; I will repay."⁶²³ In this verse, the psalmist is grieving over the injustice done him but is also impatient and angry with God who he feels is deferring the judgment requested in verse 78a. If we were the psalmist, how would we deal with such grief and anger? The answer lies in decoupling the two. Since the anger here is with God for His delay (as well as the wrongdoers for their wrongdoing); we must first deal with anger. Anger with God is helped by gaining a better understanding God, Himself, so that we recognize the inappropriateness of our anger directed toward Him. Jonah was both grieved that Nineveh was spared and angry with God for sparing them. He pleaded his anger as a valid basis for the disobedience that marked the first half of the book. His grief was understandable, but the anger was inappropriate. The answer that God provided was experiential. He prepared a gourd tree to comfort Jonah with its shade while Jonah waited for a judgment that was not going to come in his lifetime. Then God provided a worm to attack the root of the plant and kill it so that it did not have enough strength to stand upright. And then God provided an east wind to blow the gourd over. When all this was accomplished, God asked Jonah if He was angry at the judgment of the gourd. Of course, Jonah was both grieved at the loss of shade and angry that God had put him back out in the hot sun. God (in effect) said: Now you understand how I feel about Nineveh and why I wasn't so quick to pass judgment but gave them a chance to repent. You didn't want the judgment of the gourd. Why should I want the judgment of Nineveh? Now you understand me better.'⁶²⁴ This answers Jonah's anger, but what about his grief?

⁶²² "The right to petition government for **redress of grievances** is the right to make a complaint to, or to seek the assistance of one's government, without fear of punishment or reprisals" - Wikipedia on "Right to Petition"

⁶²³ Romans 12:19 Dearly beloved, avenge not yourselves, but rather give place unto wrath: for it is written, 'Vengeance is mine; I will repay,' saith the Lord.

⁶²⁴ Jonah 4: 9-11 "And God said to Jonah, 'Dost thou well to be angry for the gourd? And he said, I do well to be angry, even unto death. Then said the LORD, Thou hast had pity on the gourd, for the which thou hast not labored, neither madest it grow; which

God is no stranger to grief. One of the sins against the Holy Spirit is described as grieving the Spirit of God.⁶²⁵ Disobedience and sin grieve God's impeccable Holiness. The history of fallen human race has been one of constant grief to God.⁶²⁶ Even his chosen people grieved Him again and again in the wilderness after their deliverance from Egypt.⁶²⁷ But His grief was answered in patience and love, not destruction. In His directions to the Israelites, He sets love for one's sinning neighbor in opposition to vengeance because that is how He is.⁶²⁸ How then has God answered our grievances against Him, our offenses against His holiness? Has He turned His back on a gainsaying and disobedient humanity? The case is far from it. God has expressed His ineffable and insuperable love for us by bearing our griefs and carrying our sorrows in the expiation of our guilt.⁶²⁹ Normally, in the Christian life, pleasant affective states are emphasized: love, joy, peace, contentment. But grief also plays a role. If Jesus bore our griefs and sorrows patiently and without vengeful anger; ought not we to follow His suit? The injustices that accost us in particular and humanity in general, are a constant source of grief to a godly individual. But that is the very point. The degree to which we grieve over injustice is a measure of our heart's closeness to God. And when we truly grasp this reality; when we understand that God sometimes allows us to share His cup of grief, then our closeness to God's heart in our sufferings will not seem hateful but rather a blessing and a privilege. It is a great honor to be counted worthy to suffer grief for godliness, "that I may know him, and the power of his resurrection, and **the fellowship of his sufferings**, being made conformable unto his death."⁶³⁰

came up in a night, and perished in a night: And should not I spare Nineveh, that great city, wherein are more than six score thousand persons that cannot discern between their right hand and their left hand; and also much cattle?"

⁶²⁵ Ephesians 4:30 "And grieve not the Holy Spirit of God, whereby ye are sealed unto the day of redemption."

⁶²⁶ Genesis 6:6 "And it repented the LORD that he had made man on the earth, and it grieved him at his heart."

⁶²⁷ Numbers 14:22 "Because all those men which have seen my glory, and my miracles, which I did in Egypt and in the wilderness, and have tempted me now these ten times, and have not hearkened to my voice" Psalm 95:10 Forty years long was I grieved with this generation, and said, It is a people that do err in their heart, and they have not known my ways:

⁶²⁸ Leviticus 19:18 Thou shalt not avenge, nor bear any grudge against the children of thy people, but thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself: I am the LORD.

⁶²⁹ Isaiah 53:3-6 He is despised and rejected of men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief: and we hid as it were our faces from him; he was despised, and we esteemed him not. Surely he hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows: yet we did esteem him stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted. But he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon him; and with his stripes we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way; and the LORD hath laid on him the iniquity of us all.

⁶³⁰ Philippians 3:8 - 10 "Yea doubtless, and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord: for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung, that I may win Christ, and be found in him, not having mine own righteousness, which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith: That I may know him, and the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of his sufferings, being made conformable unto his death."

Proud Machinations

⁸⁵ The proud have digged pits for me,
Which are not after thy law.



The latter four verses of this octave (85 to 88) build, in part, the psalmist's case supporting his original prayer in 78a: "Let the proud be ashamed; for they dealt perversely with me without a cause." Their perversion lies in digging unlawful pits (85), persecuting him wrongfully (84c, 86b), and almost consuming him from the earth (87a). In verse 85, the psalmist says that the proud have digged pits for me, which are not after thy law. He is, of course, not talking about physical pits. The reference is a metaphor.

The digging of pits has been part of human activity since antiquity. Even today, they serve much the same functions. Graves are pits.⁶³¹ Construction necessarily involves digging pits for foundations.⁶³² In primitive hunter – gatherer societies, pits are used as traps for wild animals that are otherwise too threatening to confront or needed for food.⁶³³ Pits have long been used for the disposal of unwanted material, human or animal waste.⁶³⁴ But pits can be dangerous. A pit dug for construction or waste disposal can become a trap for a neighbor's unwary animal. Digging a pit also involves covering it to prevent unwanted loss to others.⁶³⁵ Even today, as we drive down a road under construction, we see large iron plates secured in the road bed that cover pits dug for installation, repair, or replacement of subterranean infrastructure. All these are lawful pits. Even God may "dig" a pit in judgment.⁶³⁶

The point of the psalmist's plaint in this verse is that the 'pits' that the proud have been digging for him are not according to God's law. The evil lies not in the pit itself, but in

⁶³¹ Isaiah 38:18 For the grave cannot praise thee, death can not celebrate thee: they that go down into the pit cannot hope for thy truth.

⁶³² Luke 6:47 – 48 "Whosoever cometh to me, and heareth my sayings, and doeth them, I will shew you to whom he is like. He is like a man who built an house, and digged deep, and laid the foundation on a rock: and when the flood arose, the stream beat vehemently upon that house, and could not shake it: for it was founded upon a rock."

⁶³³ 2 Samuel 23:20 And Benaiah the son of Jehoiada, the son of a valiant man, of Kabzeel, who had done many acts, he slew two lionlike men of Moab: he went down also and slew a lion in the midst of a pit in time of snow.

⁶³⁴ Leviticus 17:13 And whatsoever man there be of the children of Israel, or of the strangers that sojourn among you, which hunteth and catcheth any beast or fowl that may be eaten; he shall even pour out the blood thereof, and cover it with dust.

⁶³⁵ Exodus 21:33 – 34 And if a man shall open a pit, or if a man shall dig a pit, and not cover it, and an ox or an ass fall therein; the owner of the pit shall make it good, and give money unto the owner of them; and the dead beast shall be his.

⁶³⁶ Numbers 16:28 - 34 And Moses said, "Hereby ye shall know that the LORD hath sent me to do all these works; for I have not done them of mine own mind. If these men die the common death of all men, or if they be visited after the visitation of all men; then the LORD hath not sent me. But if the LORD make a new thing, and the earth open her mouth, and swallow them up, with all that appertain unto them, and they go down quick into the pit; then ye shall understand that these men have provoked the LORD." And it came to pass, as he had made an end of speaking all these words, that the ground clave asunder that was under them: And the earth opened her mouth, and swallowed them up, and their houses, and all the men that appertained unto Korah, and all their goods. They, and all that appertained to them, went down alive into the pit, and the earth closed upon them: and they perished from among the congregation. And all Israel that were round about them fled at the cry of them: for they said, Lest the earth swallow us up also.

the heart motives of the proud who dig them. Their activity reveals an implacable hatred for the psalmist and a total disrespect for God's governance. Such unlawful pits included the physical pit that Joseph's brethren used to hold him against his will.⁶³⁷ They have been used as graves, not to honor the dead by giving them a 'last resting place' but to cover the evidence of murder. But the pits spoken of here are death traps in which individual's words are carefully but unsympathetically noted and twisted to entrap them so that a capital case of sin may be brought against the innocent and justice perverted to judicial murder. Job would say of his 'miserable comforters', "... What doth your arguing reprove? ... Yea, ye overwhelm the fatherless, and ye dig a pit for your friend."⁶³⁸ A person 'digs an unlawful pit' when he seeks to entrap another innocent person in that person's words. This was Jesus' experience. Confronted by the self-righteous Pharisees, He taught a parable about "a certain king, which made a marriage for his son."⁶³⁹ In the latter half of the parable, an uninvited guest shows up at the royal wedding as a kind of 'party - crasher.' In Jesus' day royal invitations always included a fine garment given as a gift in display of royal wealth and glory. Invited guests were expected to appear in those royal robes. To fail to do so would have been a most grievous breach of decorum and, in the case of a great king, could endanger the life of the offender. In the case of the improperly dressed (and therefore uninvited) party-crasher the great king ordered His servants to "Bind him hand and foot, and take him away, and cast him into outer darkness; there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth." Realizing that Jesus had condemned their entire self-righteous life style as being worthless in God's sight, "then went the Pharisees, and took counsel how they might entangle him in his talk."⁶⁴⁰ Well might Jesus have said with the psalmist, "The proud have digged pits for me which are not according to thy law." Their machinations against Jesus eventually led to false accusations that resulted in Jesus being bound over for crucifixion. But when their 'pit' tried to close its mouth on the Son of God, like Jonah's great fish, it could not hold its prey.

⁶³⁷ Genesis 37:20 -22 Come now therefore, and let us slay him, and cast him into some pit, and we will say, Some evil beast hath devoured him: and we shall see what will become of his dreams. And Reuben heard it, and he delivered him out of their hands; and said, Let us not kill him. And Reuben said unto them, Shed no blood, but cast him into this pit that is in the wilderness, and lay no hand upon him; that he might rid him out of their hands, to deliver him to his father again.

⁶³⁸ Job 6:25 - 30 How forcible are right words! But what doth your arguing reprove? Do ye imagine to reprove words, and the speeches of one that is desperate, which are as wind? Yea, ye overwhelm the fatherless, and ye dig a pit for your friend. Now therefore be content, look upon me; for it is evident unto you if I lie. Return, I pray you, let it not be iniquity; yea, return again, my righteousness is in it. Is there iniquity in my tongue? cannot my taste discern perverse things?

⁶³⁹ Matthew 22

⁶⁴⁰ Matthew 22:15 - 21 Then went the Pharisees, and took counsel how they might entangle him in his talk. And they sent out unto him their disciples with the Herodians, saying, Master, we know that thou art true, and teachest the way of God in truth, neither carest thou for any man: for thou regardest not the person of men. Tell us therefore, What thinkest thou? Is it lawful to give tribute unto Caesar, or not? But Jesus perceived their wickedness, and said, Why tempt ye me, ye hypocrites? Show me the tribute money. And they brought unto him a penny. And he saith unto them, Whose is this image and superscription? They say unto him, Caesar's. Then saith he unto them, Render therefore unto Caesar the things which are Caesar's; and unto God the things that are God's.

What then are the marks of such unlawful pits? Its evil intents are at least four: to trap, to render powerless, to kill, and to conceal. Such the traps must be hidden, deep, inhospitable or deadly to life and finally easily covered after the fact. As the person steps unwittingly onto its surface thinking it sound ground, it gives way plunging the unsuspecting into the pit. Once in the pit, the individual is rendered powerless to escape because it is deep. Finally, with no water or food available (or worse sharpened pikes to wound) the person is left to die. At last, the pit becomes the unmarked grave that conceals evidence of the evil deed. The evil, then, lies not in the pit itself, but in the heart of the proud who digs it. But here the blindness of sin is manifest, because it is the heart of all people that lies open to the gaze of God. While a pit may be covered, God knows full well the evil deed from the first 'shovel' of earth. Did the Pharisees really believe that the God of the Universe could be unaware of their secret counsel to entangle Jesus in his talk? How strange that people who think they are doing the work of God, are really doing the work of the Adversary. Jesus knew this. "They shall put you out of the synagogues: yea, the time cometh, that whosoever killeth you will think that he doeth God service. And these things will they do unto you, because they have not known the Father, nor me."⁶⁴¹ There is a kind of immediacy and just equilibration in all this that does not have to await God's manifest intervention. Far from having others fall into their supposedly clever pits, it is the proud who fall into them. "Behold, he travaileth with iniquity, and hath conceived mischief, and brought forth falsehood. He made a pit, and digged it, and is fallen into the ditch which he made. His mischief shall return upon his own head, and his violent dealing shall come down upon his own pate."⁶⁴² It is perhaps this reality that can be a significant comfort to those who suffer as the psalmist and as Jesus, Himself, suffered. God will judge, but the sentence has already been passed by the proud upon themselves.

Persecution and Prayer

^{84b} When wilt thou execute judgment on them that persecute me?

...

⁸⁶ All thy commandments are faithful:

They persecute me wrongfully; help thou me.



In verse 85 the psalmist recounted the actions of his persecutors, "The proud have digged pits for me, which are not after thy law." Verse 86 opens with a statement that seems a little out of place. Why, we might ask, does the psalmist speak of the fidelity of God's commandments just now? How does such an assertion support his impatient complaint, "When wilt thou execute judgment on them that persecute me" and his

⁶⁴¹ John 16:2 - 3

⁶⁴² Psalm 7:14 - 16

continuing plea, “help thou me”? This ambiguity arises because the translation of the verse is not as clear as in the original Hebrew.

The word translated “faithful” is אמונה (pronounced em-oo-naw') a feminine of אמן (pronounced ay-moon') which means literally established, figuratively trusty and abstractly trustworthiness and truth. So אמונה (em-oo-naw') means (literally) firmness; (figuratively) security and (morally) fidelity. The word carries the notion of stability, steadiness and truth.

The word translated “falsely” is שקר (pronounced sheh'-ker) from שקר (pronounced shaw-kar') a primitive root that means to cheat or be untrue (usually in words), to deal falsely, to lie. So שקר (sheh'-ker) means an untruth and, by implication, a sham; something without a cause.

In addition, the two words are juxtaposed in the Hebrew. Young’s literal translation has:

All Thy commands (*are*) faithfulness,
(*With*) falsehood they have pursued me, Help Thou me.

Goldingay translates it

All your commandments are truthful,
With falsehood people harass me, help me. ⁶⁴³

What we can observe is that the psalmist has shifted the argument from one based on the actions of the proud (digging unlawful pits - 85) to an argument based the vast difference between the character of God and the psalmist’s persecutors (truth vs. falsehood – 86). What this shift does, of course is redirect the hostility of the proud from the psalmist to the God whom he serves. In manifesting behavior which rooted in false dealing and lies, the proud have exposed their antipathy not just to the psalmist but to God, himself, who has revealed His character *via* the commandments all of which are inherently true.

“Again, the argument is that YHVH’s commands, all (כָּל kol) of them, are truthful in their promise that life will work out for people who heed them. The psalm can therefore point to people’s harassment and argue that this cannot be allowed to continue. The two cola set over against each other, YHVH’s truthfulness and the tormentor’s falsehood (the words come next to each other at the center of the line), and almost allow this to speak for itself; but only almost. The last asyndetic word appeals for help.” ⁶⁴⁴

⁶⁴³ Goldingay *Psalms* Vol. 3 page 413

⁶⁴⁴ Ibid. {n.b. the word “asyndetic” means without connective. So, while the logic here is: A. You are true, B. My persecutors are false, C. (Therefore on the basis of their character *vs.* yours) Help me. The argument is asyndetic in that it omits the connective words shown in parentheses}

But this is more than an argument founded in sound reasoning. It is a desperate plea! While it is true that God may delay ⁶⁴⁵ to intervene on behalf of His servants, who are suffering persecution, such delays are not *prima-facie* evidence that belie the truth that an offence against God's servants is an offense against Him. The psalmist could say "the reproaches of them that reproached thee are fallen upon me."⁶⁴⁶ More explicitly, in the parable of the judgment of the nations, Jesus tells His followers, "Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me."⁶⁴⁷ So the argument, while correct and powerful, is not sufficient to constrain the LORD to forego the purposes of His ineffable love for humanity. For the psalmist, suffering (even unto death) can work faith and patience ⁶⁴⁸ and for the persecutor, delay may yet lead to repentance.⁶⁴⁹

But the psalmist's situation of unrelieved personal persecution also leads us to consider is a wider picture both in scope and in time than the psalmist. Inevitably, he, like us, has a focus on a present tense, personal relationship with God. All that the psalmist says from this point of view is true. His plea for help is valid and heard. Even on the level of corporate service that involves kindred spirits who fear the LORD, who know His testimonies and who keep His precepts; such prayers are valid. Even corporate persecution is experienced personally. But the history of fallen human race has been one of constant grief to God. ⁶⁵⁰ His grief was ultimately answered in patience and love, not the total destruction of humanity. Jesus perfectly expressed this ineffable and insuperable love of God for us in bearing our griefs and carrying our sorrows to His death on the cross. His life challenges us to live as He did, in self-denial and self-

⁶⁴⁵ Psalm 119: 84b "When wilt thou execute judgment on them that persecute me?"

⁶⁴⁶ Psalm 69:9 "For the zeal of thine house hath eaten me up; and the reproaches of them that reproached thee are fallen upon me." Both parts of this verse are applied to Jesus. The first we find in John 2:13-17 "And the Jews' Passover was at hand, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem, and found in the temple those that sold oxen and sheep and doves, and the changers of money sitting: And when he had made a scourge of small cords, he drove them all out of the temple, and the sheep, and the oxen; and poured out the changers' money, and overthrew the tables; And said unto them that sold doves, Take these things hence; make not my Father's house an house of merchandise. And his disciples remembered that it was written, 'The zeal of thine house hath eaten me up.'" The second we find in Romans 15:3 "For even Christ pleased not himself; but, as it is written, 'The reproaches of them that reproached thee fell on me.'"

⁶⁴⁷ Matthew 25:40

⁶⁴⁸ Romans 5:1 -5 "Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ: By whom also we have access by faith into this grace wherein we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God. And not only so, but we glory in tribulations also: knowing that tribulation worketh patience; and patience, experience; and experience, hope: And hope maketh not ashamed; because the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost which is given unto us." 2 Thessalonians 1:3-8 "We are bound to thank God always for you, brethren, as it is meet, because that your faith is growing exceedingly, and the charity of every one of you all toward each other abounds; So that we ourselves glory in you in the churches of God for your patience and faith in all your persecutions and tribulations that ye endure: Which is a manifest token of the righteous judgment of God, that ye may be counted worthy of the kingdom of God, for which ye also suffer: Seeing it is a righteous thing with God to recompense tribulation to them that trouble you. And to you who are troubled rest with us, when the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with his mighty angels, in flaming fire taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ:

⁶⁴⁹ 2 Peter 3:9 "The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness; but is longsuffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance."

⁶⁵⁰ Genesis 6:6 "And it repented the LORD that he had made man on the earth, and it grieved him at his heart."

sacrifice because we share that love of God for our neighbor.⁶⁵¹ We have been amply warned that this will involve sufferings for all, and for some, it may involve the loss of their life as a witness.

*“Fear none of those things which thou shalt suffer: behold, the devil shall cast some of you into prison, that ye may be tried; and ye shall have tribulation ten days: be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life.”*⁶⁵²

Even if martyrdom were not appointed to us, certainly we are admonished to “pray for them which ... persecute you;”⁶⁵³

Vessels of Wrath?

⁸⁷ They had almost consumed me upon earth;
But I forsook not thy precepts.



This verse is the third argument of the psalmist’s plea for a speedy and effective deliverance from his persecutors. The first argument cited their unlawful actions. “The proud have digged pits for me, which are not after thy law.” (85) The second argument cited the fundamental difference between the false ways of the wrongdoers and the faithful and true character of God. “All your commandments are truthful, with falsehood people harass me, help me.”⁶⁵⁴ (86) This last argument cites the fundamental difference between the character of the suppliant and his adversaries. “They have almost consumed me upon earth, but I forsook not thy precepts.” (87) The force of this argument is twofold. On the one hand it emphasizes the psalmist’s character which is similar to God’s. Your commandments are faithful and true and I have been faithful and true to you in not forsaking your precepts. But it also indirectly emphasizes a fundamental difference between the psalmist and God – finitude. God cannot be “consumed”. He is infinite in power and eternal in existence. The psalmist, on the other hand, is finite. He can and has almost been brought to an end by the depredations of those who hate him without a just cause. Hence, he pleads his need for a speedy delivery from their power before they succeed in ending his life. This argument builds on his earlier plea that God consider the number of days that He has appointed to the psalmist and the fact that if things continue as they are going, the psalmist will not

⁶⁵¹ Matthew 16:24 – 26 “Then said Jesus unto his disciples, ‘If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me. For whosoever will save his life shall lose it: and whosoever will lose his life for my sake shall find it. For what is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?”

⁶⁵² Revelation 2:10

⁶⁵³ Matthew 5:43 -45 “Ye have heard that it hath been said, ‘Thou shalt love thy neighbor, and hate thine enemy.’ But I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you; That ye may be the children of your Father which is in heaven: for he maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust.”

⁶⁵⁴ Goldingay Psalms Vol. 3 page 413

reach that appointed number. "How many are the days of thy servant? When wilt thou execute judgment on them that persecute me?" (84) Would God allow His appointed life time for the psalmist to be traduced by evil machinations of the wicked? Unthinkable!

So far, the psalmist has built a coherent and valid argument for a more propitious deliverance. We have also considered why God may have deferred that just judgment both for the spiritual development of the psalmist and to allow time for the wicked to repent. There is, of course, another possible element in God's dealing that we have not considered as yet: the filling up of His wrath against those who attack not just His servant but Him!

We first encounter this *modus operandi* when God enters into His covenant with Abraham. According to the ancient custom of the parties passing between the halved carcasses of sacrificial animals to ratify and make the terms binding, Abraham beholds "a smoking furnace, and a burning lamp that passed between those pieces. In the same day the LORD made a covenant with Abram." But God's promise that He would give Abraham both an heir and a land for his progeny to inherit, had a condition on the timing of its fulfillment. To give the land to Abraham's children would require judgmental destruction of the Amorites who were then living in that Promised Land. That judgment, however, would be deferred for four generations (~400 years) while Abraham's children served in Egyptian bondage because "the iniquity of the Amorites is not yet full."⁶⁵⁵ We encounter this aspect of God's dealing with sinful humanity again in Paul's letter to the Roman Christians. As a former Pharisee, Paul considers the resistant or unrepentant behavior of his countrymen.

⁶⁵⁵ Genesis 15:1 - 18 "After these things the word of the LORD came unto Abram in a vision, saying, Fear not, Abram: I am thy shield, and thy exceeding great reward. And Abram said, Lord GOD, what wilt thou give me, seeing I go childless, and the steward of my house is this Eliezer of Damascus? And Abram said, Behold, to me thou hast given no seed: and, lo, one born in my house is mine heir.

"And, behold, the word of the LORD came unto him, saying, This shall not be thine heir; but he that shall come forth out of thine own bowels shall be thine heir. And he brought him forth abroad, and said, Look now toward heaven, and tell the stars, if thou be able to number them: and he said unto him, So shall thy seed be. And he believed in the LORD; and he counted it to him for righteousness.

"And he said unto him, I am the LORD that brought thee out of Ur of the Chaldees, to give thee this land to inherit it. And he said, Lord GOD, whereby shall I know that I shall inherit it? And he said unto him, Take me a heifer of three years old, and a she goat of three years old, and a ram of three years old, and a turtledove, and a young pigeon. And he took unto him all these, and divided them in the midst, and laid each piece one against another: but the birds he divided not. And when the fowls came down upon the carcasses, Abram drove them away.

"And when the sun was going down, a deep sleep fell upon Abram; and, lo, an horror (i.e. an awesome) of great darkness fell upon him. And he said unto Abram, Know of a surety that thy seed shall be a stranger in a land that is not theirs, and shall serve them; and they shall afflict them four hundred years; And also that nation, whom they shall serve, will I judge: and afterward shall they come out with great substance. And thou shalt go to thy fathers in peace; thou shalt be buried in a good old age. But in the fourth generation they shall come hither again: for **the iniquity of the Amorites is not yet full.**"

And it came to pass, that, when the sun went down, and it was dark, behold a smoking furnace, and a burning lamp that passed between those pieces. In the same day the LORD made a covenant with Abram, saying, Unto thy seed have I given this land, from the river of Egypt unto the great river, the river Euphrates:

*“I say the truth in Christ, I lie not, my conscience also bearing me witness in the Holy Ghost, That I have great heaviness and continual sorrow in my heart. For I could wish that myself were accursed from Christ for my brethren, my kinsmen according to the flesh, who are Israelites; to whom pertaineth the adoption, and the glory, and the covenants, and the giving of the law, and the service of God, and the promises; whose are the fathers, and of whom as concerning the flesh Christ came, who is over all, God blessed forever. Amen.”*⁶⁵⁶

But he concludes that those of his countrymen who refuse to repent and believe in Jesus, while natural children of Abraham are not truly his spiritual children, for Abraham “believed in the LORD; and he counted it to him for righteousness.”⁶⁵⁷ If, therefore, there is no repentance, why then does God defer his judgment? That is the very question of the psalmist. The term “fullness of iniquity” argues a measure. A measure argues a vessel. And a vessel argues a purpose for the vessel. So, it is that the Apostle introduces the concept that unrepentant sinners are, in fact, “vessels of wrath” as opposed to repentant believers in God’s Word, who are “vessels of honor”. Paul asks the reader to consider,

*“What if God, willing to shew his wrath, and to make his power known, endured with much longsuffering the vessels of wrath fitted to destruction: And that he might make known the riches of his glory on the vessels of mercy, which he had afore prepared unto glory, even us, whom he hath called, not of the Jews only, but also of the Gentiles?”*⁶⁵⁸

The critical phrase in consideration of the deferment of God’s judgment is “endured with much longsuffering the vessels of wrath fitted to destruction.” Such were the Amorites whose iniquity was not yet full. Such was Pharaoh whose heart was systematically hardened by his constant rejection of the word of God given to him by Moses. “For the scripture saith unto Pharaoh, Even for this same purpose have I raised thee up, that I might shew my power in thee, and that my name might be declared throughout all the earth.”⁶⁵⁹ The point to note, as Paul tells us, is that God makes the power of His wrath known by enduring with much longsuffering those who systematically choose to reject His word in unbelief and refuse to repent so filling up the measure of their iniquity even as God also makes known the riches of His the glory as He deals with the vessels intended for glory. If this is the case with the psalmist’s persecutors, then those, who have almost consumed him from off the earth, have provided him a great privilege to also endure “with much longsuffering the vessels of wrath fitted to destruction” even as God endures. And this endurance has not only demonstrated the psalmist’s faithfulness as he stays true to God’s precepts, but has given God a greater opportunity to demonstrate His wrath in judgment (albeit deferred)

⁶⁵⁶ Romans 9:1-5

⁶⁵⁷ Genesis 15:6, quoted in Romans 4:3, Galatians 3:6, and James 2:23

⁶⁵⁸ Romans 9:22 - 24

⁶⁵⁹ Romans 9:17

on those who have consistently treated His servant thus. The admonition of Jesus to pray for those who persecute you⁶⁶⁰ has a serious consequence when those we pray for those who are really vessels of wrath. “Dearly beloved, avenge not yourselves, but rather give place unto wrath: for it is written, Vengeance is mine; I will repay, saith the Lord. Therefore, if thine enemy hunger, feed him; if he thirst, give him drink: for in so doing thou shalt heap coals of fire on his head. Be not overcome of evil, but overcome evil with good.”⁶⁶¹

The Testimony of Life

⁸⁸ Quicken me after thy loving-kindness;
So shall I keep the testimony of thy mouth.



The prayer, “Quicken me”, occurs 11 times in the Psalms. Nine of those occurrences are in this psalm.⁶⁶²

Many a time in this psalm doth David make this petition; and it seems strange that so often he should acknowledge himself a dead man, and desire God to quicken him. But, so it is unto the child of God: every desertion and decay of strength is a death. So desirous are they to live unto God, that when they fail in it and find any inability in their souls to serve God as they would, they account themselves but dead, and pray the Lord to quicken them.

- William Cowper.

To quicken means simply to make alive or resuscitate. The immediate context makes it clear that the psalmist’s persecutors had his death in mind, for “they had almost consumed me upon the earth.” But we should ask ourselves exactly what the psalmist means by the life for which he pleads so often in this psalm. Of course, physical life is implied, but from a biblical perspective that is only part of the issue. We find the paradox of being “dead while alive” in Paul’s instructions to Timothy about the care of Christian widows: “She that liveth in pleasure is dead while she liveth.”⁶⁶³ For the

⁶⁶⁰ Matthew 5: 44 – 45 Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you; That ye may be the children of your Father which is in heaven: for he maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust.

⁶⁶¹ Romans 12:19-21

⁶⁶² Ps 119:25 My soul cleaveth unto the dust: quicken thou me according to thy word.
Ps 119:37 Turn away mine eyes from beholding vanity; and quicken thou me in thy way.
Ps 119:40 Behold, I have longed after thy precepts: quicken me in thy righteousness.
Ps 119:88 Quicken me after thy lovingkindness; so shall I keep the testimony of thy mouth.
Ps 119:107 I am afflicted very much: quicken me, O LORD, according unto thy word.
Ps 119:149 Hear my voice according unto thy lovingkindness: O LORD, quicken me according to thy judgment.
Ps 119:154 Plead my cause, and deliver me: quicken me according to thy word.
Ps 119:156 Great are thy tender mercies, O LORD: quicken me according to thy judgments.
Ps 119:159 Consider how I love thy precepts: quicken me, O LORD, according to thy lovingkindness.

⁶⁶³ 1 Timothy 5:3-6 Honor widows that are widows indeed. But if any widow have children or nephews, let them learn first to shew piety at home, and to requite their parents: for that is good and acceptable before God. Now she that is a widow indeed, and

Psalmist (as for Paul) death meant separation. It could refer to the separation of the unseen and everlasting parts of our being from the body, leaving the latter lifeless and subject to decay. But the Bible also presents death as separation from God. "The man that wandereth out of the way of understanding shall remain in the congregation of the dead."⁶⁶⁴ Also we read in the New Testament "And you hath he quickened, who were dead in trespasses and sins..."⁶⁶⁵ This view of death accords well with the focus of this psalm on a just and harmonious relationship with God and would also tend to explain why the psalmist makes this particular request so often. This prayer also marks the midpoint of the entire psalm, as if to say the psalmist's longing to live unto God is really the central petition of the entire psalm, not just deliverance from persecution.

This prayer does, however, shed light on the intent (conscious or unconscious) of those who persecuted the psalmist. They wanted, in effect, to separate, to drive a wedge, between the servant of the LORD and the LORD, Himself. They wanted basically to break the bond of love between God and humanity, especially His own.⁶⁶⁶ In this light, the Satanic, the adversarial source of their evil is manifest. Against this background, the deferment of God's intervention on behalf of His servant, His silence, must have been very hard to bear. Silence in a relationship is one of the most difficult communications to understand, and never more so than in the most important relationship of all: the human soul with God. Is God's silence disinterest or anger? Has God forsaken me? Has He completely forgotten to be merciful to me, His faithful servant? "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me? Why art thou so far from helping me, and from the words of my roaring? O my God, I cry in the daytime, but thou hearest not; and in the night season, and am not silent."⁶⁶⁷ God's silence is so easily misread. Never was there such a great difference between appearance (God is silent and not hearing for unknown reasons: psalm 22:1 - 22) and reality (God hearing and about to act: psalm 22:23 - 31). "For he hath not despised nor abhorred the affliction of the afflicted; neither hath he hid his face from him; but when he cried unto him, he heard."⁶⁶⁸

The second part of this brief prayer is easily misunderstood. As elsewhere, it could be read as a *quid pro quo*, fox-hole like prayer that promises "if you get me out of here alive, I'll do whatever you want me to do." But there is no "if" stated or implied on the part of the psalmist in this prayer. The latter half of this prayer is simply a statement of cause and effect wholly dependent on God. If God will grant the psalmist's prayer for

desolate, trusteth in God, and continueth in supplications and prayers night and day. But she that liveth in pleasure is dead while she liveth.

⁶⁶⁴ Proverbs 21:16

⁶⁶⁵ Ephesians 2:1

⁶⁶⁶ Psalm 2:1 -3 "Why do the heathen rage, and the people imagine a vain thing? The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers take counsel together, against the LORD, and against his anointed, saying, Let us break their bands asunder, and cast away their cords from us.

⁶⁶⁷ Psalm 22:1 - 2

⁶⁶⁸ Psalm 22:24

restoration of His life in God, then, inevitably the psalmist is going to talk about what God has said, “the testimony of thy mouth.” To view this prayer as striking a bargain with God, is to view the underlying human-divine relationship as an adversarial relationship in which each party is trying to get something from the other; hardly one that could be described as a loving relationship. To view it as a statement of cause and effect (God ‘speaks’ life and, as a result, I live to tell others what He has said to me) gives insight into the fundamental mechanics of all truly spiritual testimony of God. It is “the testimony of thy mouth.” In the 22nd psalm, just cited, we have a similar prayer. David cries out, “Save me from the lion's mouth: for thou hast heard me from the horns of the unicorns. I will declare thy name unto my brethren: in the midst of the congregation will I praise thee.”⁶⁶⁹ Jesus is no exception to this principle of a true testimony of God. “I have given unto them the words which thou gavest me.”⁶⁷⁰ God gives us the words of life and we repeat them.

“We are bound to keep with all care the word of God, because it is his testimonies. He gave them to us, but they are still his own. We are to keep them as a watchman guards his master’s house, as a steward husbands his lord’s goods, as a shepherd keeps his employer’s flock. We shall have to give an account, for we are put in trust with the gospel, and woe to us if we be found unfaithful. We cannot fight a good fight, nor finish our course, unless we keep the faith. To this end the Lord must keep us: only those who are kept by the power of God unto salvation will ever be able to keep his testimonies.”⁶⁷¹

- C.H. Spurgeon

⁶⁶⁹ Psalm 22:21-22

⁶⁷⁰ John 17:6 -8 “I have manifested thy name unto the men which thou gavest me out of the world: thine they were, and thou gavest them me; and they have kept thy word. Now they have known that all things whatsoever thou hast given me are of thee. For I have given unto them the words which thou gavest me; and they have received them, and have known surely that I came out from thee, and they have believed that thou didst send me.”

⁶⁷¹ C.H. Spurgeon Treasury of David Commentary on Psalm 119:2a “Blessed are they that keep his testimonies “

ל (LAMED)

☞ *God's Subject Matter* ☞

⁸⁹ For ever, O LORD,
Thy word is settled in heaven.
⁹⁰ Thy faithfulness is unto all generations:
Thou hast established the earth, and it abideth.
⁹¹ They continue this day according to thine ordinances:
For all are thy servants.

☞ *The Consequences of Learning* ☞

⁹² Unless thy law had been my delights,
I should then have perished in mine affliction.
⁹³ I will never forget thy precepts:
For with them thou hast quickened me.

☞ *Life Experiences and Relationships* ☞

⁹⁴ I am thine, save me;
For I have sought thy precepts.
⁹⁵ The wicked have waited for me to destroy me:
But I will consider thy testimonies.

☞ *Advanced Degrees* ☞

⁹⁶ I have seen an end of all perfection:
But thy commandment is exceeding broad.

☞

ל – **Lamed** means to teach. In ancient times it stood for a shepherd's staff or an ox goad, the instrument that encouraged the animals to go in the direction that the shepherd wanted them to go.⁶⁷² The connection seems to suggest both human slowness in learning and God's patience in teaching. But learning in this psalm is very different from learning as we daily encounter it in an academic setting.⁶⁷³ The usual goal of the

⁶⁷² We have echoes of this in Paul's conversion, where Paul, blinded by the Lord cries out "Who art thou, Lord?" And the Lord said, "I am Jesus whom thou persecutest. It is hard for thee to kick against the pricks." (i.e. to resist or kick against the prodding of God leading him to faith in Jesus Christ) Acts 9:5

⁶⁷³ There are 27 references throughout this psalm that involve the matter of teaching and learning (teach, taught, meditate/ consider, learn, learned, and not forget). For convenience they are summarized here:

Teach

1. Blessed art thou, O LORD: teach me thy statutes. (12)
2. I have declared my ways, and thou heardest me: teach me thy statutes. (26)
3. Teach me, O LORD, the way of thy statutes; and I shall keep it unto the end. (33)
4. The earth, O LORD, is full of thy mercy: teach me thy statutes. (64)
5. Teach me good judgment and knowledge: for I have believed thy commandments. (66)
6. Thou art good, and doest good; teach me thy statutes. (68)
7. Accept, I beseech thee, the freewill offerings of my mouth, O LORD, and teach me thy judgments. (108)
8. Deal with thy servant according unto thy mercy, and teach me thy statutes. (124)
9. Make thy face to shine upon thy servant; and teach me thy statutes. (135)

modern student is to learn facts about subjects and to master skills in order to earn a living.⁶⁷⁴ The goal of learning in this psalm is to lay hold of the truth of God in order to live a life pleasing to Him. The subject matter of modern students is constantly changing. The subject matter (Thy word) of the psalmist is “for ever ... settled in heaven.” (90) The modern student learns by exercising his mind in both rote and critical thinking. The psalmist learns by exercising his heart in both meditation and remembrance. In either case there must be a willingness to learn. But learn what? It appears that of all the terms he has used, statutes and judgments stand out. Throughout this long psalm the psalmist pleads nine times with God to teach him: seven times with regard to His statutes (12, 26, 33, 64, 68, 124, and 135), one time with regard to His judgments (108), and one time with regard to judgment and knowledge (66). Twice he tells us that God has taught him judgments and statutes (judgments in 102 and statutes in 171). So, there is evidence of his concern to know just how the commandments of God are to play out in daily life and how to live a life pleasing to God in every situation.

But if God has deigned to teach the psalmist as he has requested, the question arises has the psalmist learned? The psalmist petitions God: “Give me understanding, that I may learn thy commandments.” (73) But only once in this psalm does he actually say that he has learned and that the hard way. “It is good for me that I have been afflicted; that I might learn thy statutes.” (71) He does promise, however to “praise thee with uprightness of heart, when I shall have learned thy righteous judgments.” (7)

Real heart learning takes time and it is meditation, not memorization that is in the psalmist’s view. Of the five times he mentions meditation, three times he promises that

Taught

1. I have not departed from thy judgments: for thou hast taught me. (102)
2. My lips shall utter praise, when thou hast taught me thy statutes. (171)

Meditate / Consider

1. I will meditate in thy precepts, and have respect unto thy ways. (15)
2. Princes also did sit and speak against me: but thy servant did meditate in thy statutes. (23)
3. My hands also will I lift up unto thy commandments, which I have loved; and I will meditate in thy statutes. (48)
4. Let the proud be ashamed; for they dealt perversely with me without a cause: but I will meditate in thy precepts. (78)
5. Mine eyes prevent the night watches that I might meditate in thy word. (148)
6. The wicked have waited for me to destroy me: but I will consider thy testimonies. (95)

Learn

1. It is good for me that I have been afflicted; that I might learn thy statutes. (71)
2. Thy hands have made me and fashioned me: give me understanding, that I may learn thy commandments. (73)

Learned

1. I will praise thee with uprightness of heart, when I shall have learned thy righteous judgments. (7)

Not Forget

1. I will delight myself in thy statutes: I will not forget thy word. (16)
2. For I am become like a bottle in the smoke; yet do I not forget thy statutes. (83)
3. I will never forget thy precepts: for with them thou hast quickened me. (93)
4. My soul is continually in my hand: yet do I not forget thy law. (109)
5. I am small and despised: yet do not I forget thy precepts. (141)
6. Consider mine affliction, and deliver me: for I do not forget thy law. (153)
7. I have gone astray like a lost sheep; seek thy servant; for I do not forget thy commandments. (176)

⁶⁷⁴ The exception is perhaps in the liberal arts where the development of the student’s cultural abilities is in focus.

he will do so (15, 48, 78) and twice he says that he has meditated: once when princes spoke against him (23) and once during the night watches (148). His consideration,⁶⁷⁵ while the wicked seek to destroy him, is focused on “thy testimonies.” (95) His meditations focus is on statutes (23, 48), precepts (15, 78), testimony, (95) and on God’s word in general (148). The shift in emphasis from learning judgments and statutes to meditating on precepts, testimonies, and statutes points to the psalmist’s desire to develop the ability to think properly (i.e. to master the precepts) about God’s statutes and His testimonies to arrive at the psalmist’s own judgments that will parallel the judgments of God.

Such effort in constant meditation even under difficult and threatening circumstances, argues that hard won realizations about righteous living will not soon be forgotten. The psalmist promises seven times not to forget your word (16), your statutes (83), your precepts (93,141), your law (109,153), or your commandments (176).

Subject matter (89-91): The first three verses of this octave acquaint us with the attributes of God’s educational subject matter, not the material itself. The attributes are stability (89), fidelity (90), and service (91). “Thy word, O LORD, is forever settled in Heaven.” Disputes, which necessarily mark the progress of the human discovery of knowledge, are not to be found here. The Word of God by which (or should we say by Whom?) the psalmist is taught is not open to dispute. Its truth is manifestly complete and no error exists therein. Its settled-ness rests upon God’s omniscience (settled) as well as His immutability (forever). But that word is also a testimony not to the unchanging truth of the subject matter but to God’s fidelity because it inevitably points to its Author and His first great text book, the created world. Men come and go, but the earth abides (relatively) unchanged. So, the earth speaks not only to the settled word in heaven but the fidelity of God to every passing generation of men as seen in the way that He has founded the earth. Summer and winter, seedtime and harvest, His compassions fail not.⁶⁷⁶ He speaks and His authority is made manifest in the laws and principles of the material word which unfailingly serve His purposes. His word is a projection of His authority (91) as in the last octave. “Thine ordinances are ... thy servants.”

Consequences of learning (92-93): As we have seen affliction can be didactic. “Before I was afflicted I went astray: but now have I kept thy word.” (67) ... “It is good for me that I have been afflicted; that I might learn thy statutes.” (71) But the consequences of learning are more than just knowing. “Death and life are in the power of the tongue: and they that love it shall eat the fruit thereof.”⁶⁷⁷ In our experience this relates not to

⁶⁷⁵ The word ‘consideration’ occurs only in this octave (95b) and nowhere else in the entire psalm

⁶⁷⁶ Genesis 8:22 “While the earth remaineth seedtime and harvest, and cold and heat, and summer and winter, and day and night shall not cease. Lamentations 3:22 It is of the LORD’S mercies that we are not consumed, because his compassions fail not

⁶⁷⁷ Proverbs 18:21

judicial pronouncements of capital punishment but to the effect that our words can have on our relationships. What we say affects the tone of our relationships. But in the spiritual plane, relationship with God is life! So, the psalmist continues “Unless thy law had been my delights, I should then have perished in mine affliction.” (92) So far so good. We know the psalmist wants a continued relationship with God because he delights in God’s Torah. But it takes two to tango, as we say. Where is God in all this? From the next verse, we learn that God “with thy precepts thou hast quickened me.” (93) God has expressed an interest in continuing the didactic and lifesaving dialogue with the psalmist because His Torah or teaching has preserved the psalmist’s life by keeping him in fellowship with God.

Life experience and relationships (94-95): The evidence of that lifesaving effect of God’s teaching presents a convincing argument to the psalmist that he has a continuing relationship with God which not only he but God, Himself, has an interest in preserving. But the word of God has made enemies for the psalmist and they bear ill-will toward him. “The wicked have waited for me to destroy me” (95a). The pattern of affliction and mindless hatred of God is now directed at anyone who would serve Him.⁶⁷⁸ And it is lethal. So, the psalmist raises the only prayer in this octave: “I am thine, save me.” It is brief. It is well founded in his prior history with God, and it is entirely reasonable given the ongoing circumstances of his life. Some relationships can be destroyed by our words, but some are destroyed by our relationship with God. Jesus tells His disciples:

“If the world hates you, ye know that it hated me before it hated you. If ye were of the world, the world would love its own: but because ye are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hates you. Remember the word that I said unto you, ‘The servant is not greater than his lord.’ If they have persecuted me, they will also persecute you; if they have kept my saying, they will keep yours also. But all these things will they do unto you for my name’s sake, because they know not him that sent me.”⁶⁷⁹

Advanced degrees (96): The last verse prompts us to ask another question. Is education ever done? In the case of one who seeks to learn to live by the word of God, the answer is “no”. If we look at a roadway as it disappears at the horizon it gets ever smaller. As academic education progresses we learn ever more about less and less because of the limitations of our human mind. We have limited time to learn and limited ability to remember. But God’s way of life is not so. There is an amazing depth to the word of God. With the word of God, if we start at the foundational commandments and go deeper, we find that our understanding of life and all things around us becomes

⁶⁷⁸ Matthew 10:34 - 36 “Think not that I am come to send peace on earth: I came not to send peace, but a sword. For I am come to set a man at variance against his father, and the daughter against her mother, and the daughter in law against her mother in law. And a man’s foes shall be they of his own household.’

¹ Thessalonians 3:4 “For verily, when we were with you, we told you before that we should suffer tribulation; even as it came to pass, and ye know.’

⁶⁷⁹ John 15:18- 21

“exceeding broad.” That is the deep things of God explain more and more of what we struggle to understand in our everyday lives. What lies way down, under the commandments is a profound simplicity that acts as a kind of “unified field theory” that explains all of life. Nor is the process of learning in God’s ‘classroom’ necessarily time constrained as in normal classrooms. Eternity will not suffice us to learn all there is to learn of the God who transcends all created comprehension. But the delightful process of learning will surely be foundational to our ongoing praise of the glories of the Majesty on High. The end of perfection (of a life live pleasing to God) is that it has no end. It will take all of eternity to even begin to plumb the unsearchable riches of His mercy and grace vouchsafed to us in His Son, Jesus Christ.

Behold the glories of the Lamb
Amidst His Father’s throne
Prepare new honors for His name
And songs before unknown.

- Isaac Watts

No Other Way

⁸⁹ Forever, O LORD,

Thy word is settled in heaven.

⁹⁰ Thy faithfulness is unto all generations:

Thou hast established the earth, and it abideth.



As noted before, לָ (lamed) means to teach. The letter is thought to derive from the representation of a stick that was used to goad livestock, by means of which the shepherd shows them the way in which they should go. The means of that teaching is God’s word. The attributes of the subject matter taught (Thy word) reflect the attributes of the One who utters it. God’s word is omnipresent being seen in both heaven and earth. The word is immutable, settled forever in Heaven. His word is eternally faithful (and we may infer reaches out in love) to all generations of men. The word of the LORD is creative. By means of it, He has established the earth and the eternal fidelity of His word is adumbrated on earth in the continual abiding of His created world. If the previous octave was redolent with suffering in persecution and the plaintive cry of the psalmist for not only justice but an explanation of God’s delay, here we gain anew an insight as to why God seemed to be silent. The psalmist needed time (or spiritual space) to learn the lessons that God’s word had for him. These are not merely lessons in conceptual knowledge, though their explanation may be possible cognitively. These are experiential lessons that cause a fundamental (but desirable) change in the psalmist’s

character – his growth in humility and obedience ⁶⁸⁰ rooted in faith, hope, and love, the golden chord of all Scripture.⁶⁸¹ In adversity he learns to continue to hope in God's word.⁶⁸² In the wearying trials, he does not forget the lessons that he has been taught.⁶⁸³ Though tried almost to death, he still remains faithful to God. ⁶⁸⁴ His whole purpose in life (as God grants that life to him) is to testify of God's loving-kindness. ⁶⁸⁵ The psalmist has already told us that "It is good for me that I have been afflicted; that I might learn thy statutes."⁶⁸⁶ Even our Lord Jesus, "though he was a Son, yet he learned obedience by the things which he suffered."⁶⁸⁷ So we can observe that learning in God's 'classroom' can be both painful and effective. Further it suits the student for that purpose for which the LORD has intended the individual. Of Jesus, in His suffering, it is said, "Being made perfect, he became the author of eternal salvation unto all them that obey him."⁶⁸⁸

But there is another precious lesson that the disciple of God learns about the Word of God. Though it may seem severe in its presenting aspects, the love of God for the individual disciple that lies behind His word is inescapable. We cannot truly run out of God's 'classroom' though we may want to and try to. These verses, which point to the omnipresence, the immutability, the fidelity, the beneficence, and the creative power of God's word, also hint at the experience of its inescapability.

*Whither shall I go from thy spirit?
Or whither shall I flee from thy presence?
If I ascend up into heaven, thou art there:
If I make my bed in hell, behold, thou art there.
If I take the wings of the morning,
And dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea;
Even there shall thy hand lead me,
And thy right hand shall hold me.
If I say, Surely the darkness shall cover me;
Even the night shall be light about me.
Yea, the darkness hideth not from thee;
But the night shineth as the day:
The darkness and the light are both alike to thee.*

⁶⁸⁰ Philippians 2:8 And (*Jesus*) being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross.

⁶⁸¹ 1 Corinthians 13:13 "And now these three remain: faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love." (NIV)

⁶⁸² Psalm 119:81 My soul fainteth for thy salvation: but I hope in thy word.

⁶⁸³ Psalm 119:83 For I am become like a bottle in the smoke; yet do I not forget thy statutes.

⁶⁸⁴ Psalm 119:87 They had almost consumed me upon earth; but I forsook not thy precepts.

⁶⁸⁵ Psalm 119:88 Quicken me after thy loving-kindness; so shall I keep the testimony of thy mouth.

⁶⁸⁶ Psalm 119:71

⁶⁸⁷ Hebrews 5:7-9 Who in the days of his flesh, when he had offered up prayers and supplications with strong crying and tears unto him that was able to save him from death, and was heard in that he feared; Though he were a Son, yet learned he obedience by the things which he suffered. And being made perfect, he became the author of eternal salvation unto all them that obey him;

⁶⁸⁸ Hebrews 5:9 (above)

*For thou hast possessed my reins:
Thou hast covered me in my mother's womb.*⁶⁸⁹

For the individual upon whom God places His 'hand' there is no other way out. The disciple may be "confident of this very thing, that he which hath begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ"⁶⁹⁰ This is a learning borne of that love of which the blind Scottish hymn writer, George Matheson wrote:

O Love that will not let me go
I rest my weary soul in thee
I give thee back the life I owe
That in thy ocean depths its flow
May richer fuller be.

Serving God's Servants

⁹¹ They continue this day according to thine ordinances:
For all are thy servants.



The first colon of the last verse of this triad (91a) challenges our understanding of just what "They continue" refers back to. Does it refer to the heavens (89b) and the earth (90b)? Does it refer to all generations (90a)? Perhaps the phrase "for all are thy servants" in (91b) could suggest both: heaven, earth, and all generations. But the history of humanity is continually marked by rebellion:

"Why do the heathen rage,
And the people imagine a vain thing?
The kings of the earth set themselves,
And the rulers take counsel together, against the LORD,
And against his anointed, saying,
Let us break their bands asunder,
And cast away their cords from us."⁶⁹¹

How then can we say that the kings and their nations who rebel against the LORD are His servants? The key to understanding this ambiguity lies in the word "continue." Whoever "they" refers to, the notion of 'continuance to this day' is associated with them. The word "continue" points back to other words: "settled" used in conjunction with God's word in heaven and "established - abideth" used in conjunction with the earth. But we know that the earth was established by God's word. "For this they (*i.e. the scoffers of the last days*) are willingly ignorant of, that by the word of God the heavens

⁶⁸⁹ Psalm 139:7-13

⁶⁹⁰ Philippians 1:6

⁶⁹¹ Psalm 2:1-3

were of old, and the earth standing out of the water and in the water"⁶⁹² The whole tenor of this octave emphasizes the everlasting nature of the word of the LORD and that which it accomplishes: the creation of heaven and earth.⁶⁹³ So God's works stand firm because God's word stands firm. What He says and the creation that His words have affected stand firm, because "the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and Godhead... ." ⁶⁹⁴

But this verse adds something more. It establishes a purpose for both God's word and His work. They are "all thy servants." That is the heavens and the earth and God's word that created them serve His purposes. What then of a rebellious and gain-saying humanity? As part of God's creation, they too must serve some purpose in the divine economy. The "all" of verse 91b is exceedingly broad. We could assert that despite the cast of the human will, all humanity having been created, ultimately serves God's purposes if only as objects that reveal His ongoing fidelity as noted in 90a: "Thy faithfulness is unto all generations." Jesus, himself takes note of His Father's impartial fidelity when He says,

"... Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you; that ye may be the children of your Father which is in heaven: for he maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust." ⁶⁹⁵

But the psalmist's mindset throughout this psalm goes much farther. He makes a very real difference between himself as God's servant and the proud who persecute him. Thirteen times he refers to himself as "thy servant."⁶⁹⁶ The psalmist knows full well that while the wicked may serve God's purpose as vessels of wrath ultimately fitted to destruction, they are so because of their unwillingness to believe God or to serve God. The psalmist, on the other hand, wants to serve God with all his heart. That heart attitude casts a very different light on how the heavens and the earth as well as God's fidelity to all generations of men are understood. While all creation serves God's purposes, few have as their purpose to serve God willingly out of love for Him. It is the difference between serving a purpose as a created entity and having as one's purpose to serve God out of love. For the latter, the servant of the LORD, the fidelity and the love of God for His creation play a very different role in the divine economy. Behind the visible and invisible works of God is the Word of God.⁶⁹⁷ And the Word of God reveals

⁶⁹² 2 Peter 3:5

⁶⁹³ Genesis 1:1 In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth.

⁶⁹⁴ Romans 1:20

⁶⁹⁵ Matthew 5:44 -45

⁶⁹⁶ Verses 17, 23, 38, 49, 65, 76, 84, 122, 124, 125, 135, 140, 176

⁶⁹⁷ John 1:1-3 "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. The same was in the beginning with God. All things were made by him; and without him was not any thing made that was made." And again "Thou art worthy, O

above all the love of God for humanity.⁶⁹⁸ But love is not selfish. So, the psalmist knows that the word of God and the works of God all tend to the benefit of those who willingly allow themselves to return His love by His ever-present grace. For them “the heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament showeth his handiwork. Day unto day utters speech, and night unto night showeth knowledge. There is no speech nor language, where their voice is not heard.”⁶⁹⁹ For the servant who is the willing student, the eternal, omnipresent, immutable, creative and faithful word of God is the subject matter of their lessons; the heavens and the earth are their classroom, and the LORD of all is their teacher. And all these are His servants because behind all of them is the immeasurable and ineffable Love of God as revealed in Jesus Christ, God’s Son.

A Student’s Testimony

⁹² Unless thy law had been my delights,
I should then have perished in mine affliction.

⁹³ I will never forget thy precepts:
For with them thou hast quickened me.

⁹⁴ I am thine, save me;
For I have sought thy precepts.



If the first three verses of this octave, marked by ♪ (lamed – to teach) told us of the subject matter in its stability (“Forever, O LORD, thy word is settled in heaven”), the Teacher (“Thy faithfulness is unto all generations”) and the class room (Thou hast established the earth, and it abideth ... for all are Thy servants”); the next three verses tell us of the testimony of the student. We can infer this from the shift in personal pronoun from “thy – thou” in verses 89-91 to “I – me – mine” in verses 92-94. The central impact in all three of these verses has does not have to do with knowledge for knowledge’s sake, but with the very life of the psalmist (“perished – quickened – save me”). If we remember how the psalmist equates relationship with God as life and separation from God as death, then the causal and life preserving effect of the law and the precepts is obvious. In the verse under consideration, the effect of the law has been preventive: “Unless the law ... I had perished.” How can this be? If we look ahead to verse 95a, we see forces that were working for the psalmist’s destruction: “The wicked have waited for me to destroy me.” The question then is not just the presence of the law as a mute protector or a talisman that guarded the psalmist against evil, but a choice

Lord, to receive glory and honor and power: for thou hast created all things, and for thy pleasure they are and were created.” - Revelation 4:11

⁶⁹⁸ John 3:16 For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.

⁶⁹⁹ Psalm 19:1-3

given to the psalmist to make in the “classroom.” Either he will seek satisfaction and salvation for himself in desiring to return destruction on the wicked who seek to work him ill, or he will delight in the law. Jesus tells us that where our treasure is there our heart will be also.⁷⁰⁰ While Jesus’ saying specifically addressed possession of material goods on earth as opposed to the consequential reward for good works on earth laid up in heaven, the sequence of desire for “treasure” resulting in seeking “treasure” so that we obtain “treasure” and therefore delight in possessing “treasure” is a perfectly general statement about how the human heart works. And this is what really transpired in the class room. God presented the psalmist with His word, forever settled in heaven; and the wicked presented the psalmist with the antithesis as they “waited for me to destroy me.” The challenge was not so much whether the psalmist would focus on God, his teacher, or the wicked whose malevolence hovered around him, as it was whether the psalmist would focus on God or on himself for self-preservation. The contrast, while subtle, is nevertheless almost universal. The invitation of the Adversary is always on self-preservation based on actions taken independent of and in isolation from the will of God. In contrast, in making the “law of God (i.e. His governance, the Gospel) our delight; we acknowledge that our life depends not so much on our own frenetic efforts, as upon the fidelity of God as revealed in His word to us. This verse, then, points directly to a fundamental operative principle in the temptation of the adversary. It was so in Jesus’ experience.

*“Then was Jesus led up of the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted of the devil. And when he had fasted forty days and forty nights, he was afterward an hungred. And when the tempter came to him, he said, If thou be the Son of God, command that these stones be made bread. But he answered and said, It is written, Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God.”*⁷⁰¹

It is also so in our experience. All attempts at self-preservation, in independence of God’s word and His provision for our salvation, are doomed to be futile, even though they seem to be the best and even the only way forward for us.

*“... a man’s foes shall be they of his own household. He that loveth father or mother more than me is not worthy of me: and he that loveth son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me. And he that taketh not his cross, and followeth after me, is not worthy of me. He that findeth his life shall lose it: and he that loseth his life for my sake shall find it.”*⁷⁰²

So often we confuse the means by which God sustains us (bread or family or job or bank account) with God, Himself. In so doing, we make an end of a means, and a thing

⁷⁰⁰ Matthew 19 - 21 Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth, where moth and rust doth corrupt, and where thieves break through and steal. But lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through nor steal: for where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.

⁷⁰¹ Matthew 4:1-4

⁷⁰² Matthew 10:36 - 39

into our god whom we decide to serve in order to be preserved. But such a choice immediately separates us from the God upon whom our eternal life ultimately depends. **To choose** to reject the means that God can use to sustain life in favor of **trusting God**; to live not by bread that can sustain physical alone but not spiritual life, **is to choose spiritual life**. The psalmist in delighting in God's law is saying in effect I choose not live by the bread of vengeance, hate, and self-defense alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God. And it is God's presentation of His word in the law that allows the psalmist to make that critical choice between life and death. Millennia have passed since the psalmist gave his testimony and much has been added to the deposit of God's word for each of us. But the choice has not changed. Nor has the ploy of the adversary changed.

"For whosoever will save his life shall lose it: and whosoever will lose his life for my sake shall find it. For what is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? Or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?" ⁷⁰³

Remembering by Heart

⁹² Unless thy law had been my delights,
I should then have perished in mine affliction.

⁹³ I will never forget thy precepts:
For with them thou hast quickened me.

⁹⁴ I am thine, save me;
For I have sought thy precepts.



Forgetfulness is a constant problem in education. How much of what we were taught in our own lives about mathematics, chemistry, or biology have we forgotten? The old principle "use it or lose it" seems to apply not just to cognitive learning but to the knowledge of God as well. As noted in other sections, the precepts have been the source of the psalmist's meditation and his delight. But here we see that they are the means of preserving his relationship with God. The word "forget" as the psalmist uses it is not just a cognitive absent-mindedness but a careless or willful ignoring of the life-principles which God has shown him; in a word: disobedience rooted in willful ignorance. What the psalmist is saying here is that I will never stop living by the principles that you have shown me by hard experience and that the wicked have sought to rob me of by their endless persecution. The experience cited is not just the hard actions of the wicked who are endlessly trying to distract him, but also the past

⁷⁰³ Matthew 16:24 -27 Then said Jesus unto his disciples, If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me. For whosoever will save his life shall lose it: and whosoever will lose his life for my sake shall find it. For what is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? Or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul? For the Son of man shall come in the glory of his Father with his angels; and then he shall reward every man according to his works.

faithfulness of God in sustaining and enlarging his life: “With them (*i.e. thy precepts*) thou hast quickened me.” So, in the past, by choosing to be faithful to God, (“thy law has been my delight”) God has, in response, preserved him from spiritual alienation. The psalmist knows that, as God does not change, so too the principles of relating to Him do not change. What has worked in the past (92) will work in the present (93) and, he is confident, will continue to work in the future (94). If we examine those areas of cognitive knowledge that we have not only remembered but which have grown; they are those areas on which our very livelihood depends. How much more important, then, is thoughtful obedience to God’s precepts for the psalmist’s continuing life in God? He knows that if he is faithful to God, that God will be faithful to him. As we have observed elsewhere, this is not a *quid pro quo* equation with fidelity as a “token” to be exchanged between the psalmist and God. It is above all a covenantal relationship, a fellowship, which the psalmist knows should be characterized by mutual fidelity. And he is telling God that he intends to do his part.

Of course, the psalmist doesn’t always get it right. He has told us from the very beginning that he has gone astray. The psalmist cries out in confession as well as expressing his sincere desire to observe to do what God has told him. (“Thou hast commanded us to keep thy precepts diligently. O that my ways were directed to keep thy statutes!” – 4, 5). He has called on the mercy of God as His teacher (“The earth, O LORD, is full of thy mercy: teach me thy statutes” – 69). The case is no different with us, The Apostle John tells us:

*“This then is the message which we have heard of him, and declare unto you, that God is light, and in him is no darkness at all. If we say that we have fellowship with him, and walk in darkness, we lie, and do not the truth. But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin. If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. If we say that we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us.”*⁷⁰⁴

John reasons from the character of God (a. “God is light” and b. “in him is no darkness at all”) to the subject of fellowship (our walk) with God which must express His character if it is real. John knows the universal truth of all relationships human or divine: “can two walk together, except they be agreed?”⁷⁰⁵ If the character of our walk befits the character of God, then we may conclude that we really do have fellowship with Him. That is what the psalmist is saying in the verse under consideration. “I will never forget thy precepts.” I will never walk in the darkness of willful moral ignorance.

⁷⁰⁴ 1 John 1:5 - 10

⁷⁰⁵ Amos 3:3

But John goes on to say that such a fellowship requires that we acknowledge that we do not walk in those precepts perfectly. Sometimes we sin. John points out what the psalmist knows very well in his age. "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." Acknowledgement of personal failure on our part gives God the opportunity to demonstrate His faithfulness in forgiving us and restoring that fellowship. We are not perfect, but we are forgiven many times.

The critical difference between the psalmist's age and ours lies in the understanding of why the impeccably holy God should forgive even one failure, let alone many. For the psalmist, the divinely instituted sacrificial system was the basis for hope in God's mercy. Interestingly, however, in this psalm, there is absolutely no mention of that system, because the view in this psalm as in most is wholly interior. It is true that we understand more fully the One of whom all those ancient sacrifices spoke: "the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin." But while our knowledge of the basis for God's covenantal mercy may have grown, the psalmist and the prophets would warn us of something that has not changed. Forgiveness, for the psalmist, lay not in a correct external performance of some divinely appointed ritual, nor, for us, in some correct apprehension of true doctrine about the efficacy of Jesus' sacrifice for us on the cross. Now as then, God looks at the cast of the human heart: "the sacrifices of God are a broken spirit: a broken and a contrite heart, O God, thou wilt not despise.⁷⁰⁶ ... For thus saith the high and lofty One that inhabiteth eternity, whose name is Holy; I dwell in the high and holy place, with him also that is of a contrite and humble spirit, to revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the heart of the contrite ones.⁷⁰⁷ ... For all those things hath mine hand made, and all those things have been, saith the LORD: but to this man will I look, even to him that is poor and of a contrite spirit, and trembleth at my word.⁷⁰⁸ "

⁷⁰⁶ Psalm 51:17

⁷⁰⁷ Isaiah 57:15

⁷⁰⁸ Isaiah 66:2

Salvation from the Wicked

- ⁹³ I will never forget thy precepts:
For with them thou hast quickened me.
- ⁹⁴ I am thine, save me;
For I have sought thy precepts.
- ⁹⁵ The wicked have waited for me to destroy me:
But I will consider thy testimonies.



When we speak of salvation today, we customarily refer to deliverance from the eternal condemnation of God. In that sense, to experience the eternal felicity of a worshipful and adoring relationship with the Creator of the Universe really is to “live.” In this light, when the psalmist says, “I will never forget thy precepts: for with them thou hast quickened me” and when he pleads “save me”, we might understand his view of salvation as eternal salvation. While such an understanding is nascent in this verse, it is not the actual point that the psalmist had in mind, as verse 94 makes clear. The wicked, true to form throughout this psalm, have been waiting for the psalmist “to destroy me.” And it is from their nefarious clutches that the psalmist seeks deliverance. Doubtless we may see that his affirmation in verse 93 that the precepts of God have been the instrumentality of his former deliverance or quickening, but verse 95 makes it clear that such a deliverance was from the ongoing hostility of the wicked toward himself. It is almost as if the wicked are an enraged bull, the psalmist a matador, and the precepts of God his cloak by which the hostile advances of the wicked are foiled in confusion. Such a view is limited, however, in that for the bull-fighter, survival depends on his skill at manipulation of the distracting cape. The psalmist knows, however, that his deliverance from the hostile attacks of the wicked is wholly dependent on the grace of God vouchsafed by the relationship subsisting between the psalmist and Himself and not on his independent actions. The psalmist says simply, “I am thine, save me.” While precepts may have been the instrumentality of that deliverance, just as the matador’s cloak is the instrumentality of his deliverance, God is the ultimate source of deliverance and the precepts are rather the evidence that the psalmist has done his part in the servant-master relationship. “I am thine ... for I have sought thy precepts.” He has every reason, then, based on personal relational history (“thou hast quickened me”) and his understanding of the role of mutual fidelity (“... save me; for I have sought thy precepts”) to expect that God will do His part.

If we concede that the salvation for which the psalmist is pleading in this verse is not primarily eternal but temporal; not deliverance from the righteous condemnation of Almighty God but deliverance from the hostile machinations of the wicked, how then are we to apply it to our own lives? The answer is obvious. We deceive ourselves if we

think that the world is our friend. John tells us “And we know that we are of God, and the whole world lieth in wickedness.”⁷⁰⁹ Jesus tells his followers, “These things I have spoken unto you, that in me ye might have peace. In the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world.”⁷¹⁰ For the believer today, people who ignore the precepts of God and who go about in disobedience to them, will always have a hostility (nascent or active) toward those who like the psalmist “have sought thy precepts”; to those who determine “I will never forget thy precepts.” And, like the psalmist, we too may hope for divine intervention far beyond relying on our own interpersonal, ‘matador-skills’ to effect deliverance from the hostility of evil men. “For the eyes of the LORD run to and fro throughout the whole earth, to shew himself strong in the behalf of them whose heart is perfect toward him.”⁷¹¹ The psalmist’s view, far from being myopic because it focuses on an immediate temporal situation rather than the eternal state, is something we need always to remember. God is actively involved in the lives of all those whom He chooses, especially as they endeavor to live their lives according to His will.⁷¹²

⁷⁰⁹ 1 John 5:19

⁷¹⁰ John 16:33

⁷¹¹ 2 Chronicles 16:9a The quote is interesting because its setting provides a spiritual counter example to that of the psalmist before us. It was a prophetic utterance by the prophet Hanani to Asa the king of Judah. Asa had relied on earthly military alliances rather than God to provide deliverance from the king of Israel despite history that indicated that such trusting of men was not only unnecessary but foolish. While Asa’s approach seemed to work, Hanani confronted the king with his spiritual failure. The whole story is in 2 Chronicles 16:1-10.

“In the six and thirtieth year of the reign of Asa, Baasha king of Israel came up against Judah, and built Ramah, to the intent that he might let none go out or come in to Asa king of Judah. Then Asa brought out silver and gold out of the treasures of the house of the LORD and of the king’s house, and sent to Benhadad king of Syria, that dwelt at Damascus, saying, There is a league between me and thee, as there was between my father and thy father: behold, I have sent thee silver and gold; go, break thy league with Baasha king of Israel, that he may depart from me. And Benhadad hearkened unto king Asa, and sent the captains of his armies against the cities of Israel; and they smote Ijon, and Dan, and Abelmaim, and all the store cities of Naphtali. And it came to pass, when Baasha heard it, that he left off building of Ramah, and let his work cease. Then Asa the king took all Judah; and they carried away the stones of Ramah, and the timber thereof, wherewith Baasha was building; and he built therewith Geba and Mizpah.

And at that time Hanani the seer came to Asa king of Judah, and said unto him, ‘Because thou hast relied on the king of Syria, and not relied on the LORD thy God, therefore is the host of the king of Syria escaped out of thine hand. Were not the Ethiopians and the Lubims a huge host, with very many chariots and horsemen? Yet, because thou didst rely on the LORD, he delivered them into thine hand. For the eyes of the LORD run to and fro throughout the whole earth, to shew himself strong in the behalf of them whose heart is perfect toward him. Herein thou hast done foolishly: therefore from henceforth thou shalt have wars.’ Then Asa was wroth with the seer, and put him in a prison house; for he was in a rage with him because of this thing. And Asa oppressed some of the people the same time. And, behold, the acts of Asa, first and last, lo, they are written in the book of the kings of Judah and Israel.”

⁷¹² Paul is an interesting example of this reality. God was involved in his life long before he forsook his ignorant pursuit of self righteous behavior that had issued only in persecution of the innocent. Paul tells his story to King Agrippa in Acts 26:9-16.

“I verily thought with myself, that I ought to do many things contrary to the name of Jesus of Nazareth. Which thing I also did in Jerusalem: and many of the saints did I shut up in prison, having received authority from the chief priests; and when they were put to death, I gave my voice against them. And I punished them oft in every synagogue, and compelled them to blaspheme; and being exceedingly mad against them, I persecuted them even unto strange cities. Whereupon as I went to Damascus with authority and commission from the chief priests, At midday, O king, I saw in the way a light from heaven, above the brightness of the sun, shining round about me and them which journeyed with me. And when we were all fallen to the earth, I heard a voice speaking unto me, and saying in the Hebrew tongue, Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me? it is hard for thee to kick against the pricks. And I said, Who art thou, Lord? And he said, I am Jesus whom thou persecutest. But rise, and stand upon thy feet: for I have appeared unto thee for this purpose, to make thee a minister and a witness both of these things which thou hast seen, and of those things in the which I will appear unto thee; delivering thee from the people, and from the Gentiles, unto whom now I send thee, to open their eyes, and to

"I am yours" indicates that the psalmist accepted a servant's responsibility and YHVH accepted a master's responsibility. Verse 94 appeals for that to continue to be true. One who belongs to YHVH can appeal YHVH to deliver. The line emphasizes YHVH's direct involvement in our lives. YHVH is not just the deist clockmaker. But part of the basis for expecting YHVH to behave as if we belong to YHVH is that we have so behaved. The second colon claims to have fulfilled that condition by having had "recourse to YHVH's orders" making it our business to treat YHVH's commands as our resource for knowing how to live." ⁷¹³

Perhaps the most important lesson we can learn in the God's 'classroom' is daily reliance on the kind providence of the God who has demonstrated His unfathomable love for each of us in sending His Son Jesus to provide that salvation, both immediately temporal and eternal, at such a great cost.

Deliverance from Evil

⁹⁴ I am thine, save me;
For I have sought thy precepts.



In the previous section we considered the immediacy of the psalmist's plea. The salvation he sought was not from the wrath of God but the evil intentions of wicked men. The fact that he continually sought to understand God's precepts even in the face of their intent to destroy him was not only a genuine expression of his desire for the things of God, but also *prima facie* evidence that he was truly God's servant and therefore well within bounds in asking God to intervene on his behalf. The simple application for him then, as for us now, was that God does intervene, perhaps far more than we realize on behalf of those "whose heart is perfect toward him."⁷¹⁴ This begs the question why is such divine intervention necessary. Is it not possible, even praiseworthy, that we make every effort to defend ourselves before we seek divine aid? The immediate (and trivial answer) is that we are often unable to really effectively defend ourselves against such depredations. But the question also points us to an underlying conflict that only superficially involves human protagonists. It is the age-old hostility between God and His adversary, His "Satan" (for such is the meaning of the name). Given that this battle is far deeper and more ancient involving a malevolent intelligence far beyond human comprehension, it is no wonder that Jesus teaches us to pray, among other petitions, "Deliver us from evil." It would take far more than just a few passing observations to adequately describe the conflict which, in one form or

turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins, and inheritance among them which are sanctified by faith that is in me."

⁷¹³ Goldingay Psalms Vol. 3 page 416

⁷¹⁴ 2 Chronicles 16:9a

another, lies at the root of all the spiritual struggles of humanity to attain to godliness. There are, however, some concepts that can be helpful. Among these are deception, division, and destruction.

Deception: The psalmist is not at all deceived about his state both as a servant of the Most High God and as an object of the hatred of the wicked. But the wicked, by their very participation in the conflict, manifest their deception. They may have been jealous of the psalmist. But there is a possibility that they succumbed to a most subtle deception that the evil which they seek is really righteousness. Such men see themselves as godly men enraged at the evil man who pretends to be God's servant. Of this particular delusion Jesus warns his disciples, "...The time cometh, that whosoever killeth you will think that he doeth God service. And these things will they do unto you, because they have not known the Father, nor me."⁷¹⁵ There are, of course, other deceptions such as the one that would depersonalize the conflict. "It is not Satan opposing God", some say "but the ancient battle of Good vs. Evil." Not only does this answer deny the existence of God, it subtly undermines the absolute authority that defines the conflict in the first place. If there is no God, only good and evil, then what is good and what is evil? Moral relativism allows the manifestly evil man to "take the moral high ground" because he has neatly (so he thinks) done away with God and absolute right and wrong. Now all his selfish machinations against the servant of God can be justified. In a morally relativistic world, the evil man becomes good and the good man is evil. Isaiah warns of such, "Woe unto them that call evil good and good evil; that put darkness for light, and light for darkness; that put bitter for sweet, and sweet for bitter!"⁷¹⁶ Whatever the deception, it has the potential to bring about division.

Division: When confronted with the depredations of the wicked, whether against themselves or other innocents, the servant of God is faced with a choice. The temptation is at least two-fold: offense at injustices perpetrated against the oppressed or vulnerable (including oneself), and the normal desire for self-preservation. The first morphs easily from the valid desire for redress of grievance expressed in prayer to a desire to lay hold of vengeance because divine justice seems to take too long getting to the end we think it should. Impatience with God is the handmaiden of human vengeance. But God warns His servants through the Apostle Paul, "Dearly beloved, avenge not yourselves, but rather give place unto wrath: for it is written, Vengeance is mine; I will repay, saith the Lord."⁷¹⁷ The Apostle Peter likewise cites Jesus' patient behavior under Pontius Pilate. "If, when ye do well, and suffer for it, ye take it patiently, this is acceptable with God. For even hereunto were ye called: because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an

⁷¹⁵ John 16:2b, 3

⁷¹⁶ Isaiah 5:20 This shift also occurs in philosophy in which the doctrines of some variants of pragmatism, in denying all metaphysical speculation to the philosopher, create a moral vacuum in which the pragmatic ends justify the immoral means. 'If it works it must be right.'

⁷¹⁷ Romans 12:19

example, that ye should follow his steps: who did no sin, neither was guile found in his mouth: who, when he was reviled, reviled not again; when he suffered, he threatened not; but committed himself to him that judges righteously.”⁷¹⁸ The second temptation, for self-preservation, also leads away from prayer to determined self-action. This is not to say that we should never take action in self-defense. The deception lies in the solicitation to play the same game as the wicked; to beat them at their own game; to play ‘tit for tat’. While this approach may be the most emotionally rewarding as regards retaliation, it has a steep price, because the servant of God becomes just like the wicked. He is now playing their game by their rules. Of course, not all of God’s servants fall into this spiritual trap. And this differing of choices (prayer or playing their game) accomplishes the second facet of the adversary’s ploy – division.

Destruction: The psalmist is a realist in spiritual matters. He knows full well what the wicked are trying to do. “The wicked have waited for me to destroy me.” But to what does this surface destruction of the servant of God answer on the deeper level of Satan’s blistering hostility toward God? It is nothing less than a manifestation of Satan’s intent to destroy God’s work and rob Him of His worship. If Satan cannot obtain that at which he clutched in his rebellion;⁷¹⁹ then he is determined that God shall not have what He has purposed in creation nor achieve the ends for which He undertook it.⁷²⁰ Satan’s hostility explains not only psalm 119:95, but Eden and Golgotha as well. It explains two millennia of internecine hostility within the Church that should have manifested the mutual love of God for one another as a witness of the truth of who Jesus really is. “Neither pray I for these alone, but for them also which shall believe on me through their word; that they all may be one; as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us: that the world may believe that thou hast sent me.”⁷²¹ Satan’s intent has always been to foster division in the church as a way of putting the lie to the good news of that salvation for which the psalmist and all servants of God pray. If we look at Biblical and world history as well as current events, the picture seems particularly bleak. Satan seems to have gotten the upper hand and succeeded in his evil intent. Whether the psalmist was really destroyed by the wicked we do not know. Probably not, but the writer to the Hebrews tells us that while some “escaped the edge

⁷¹⁸ 1 Peter 2:20b - 23

⁷¹⁹ Isaiah speaks of this rebellion and its intent. “How art thou fallen from heaven, O Lucifer, son of the morning! How art thou cut down to the ground, which didst weaken the nations! For thou hast said in thine heart, I will ascend into heaven, I will exalt my throne above the stars of God: I will sit also upon the mount of the congregation, in the sides of the north: I will ascend above the heights of the clouds; I will be like the most High. Yet thou shalt be brought down to hell, to the sides of the pit. They that see thee shall narrowly look upon thee, and consider thee, saying, ‘Is this the man that made the earth to tremble, that did shake kingdoms; that made the world as a wilderness, and destroyed the cities thereof; that opened not the house of his prisoners?’” Isaiah 14:12 – 17

Jesus, Himself, speaks of this ancient rebellion. “I beheld Satan as lightning fall from heaven.” Luke 10:18b

⁷²⁰ Revelation 4:11 “Thou art worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honor and power: for thou hast created all things, and for thy pleasure they are and were created.”

⁷²¹ John 17:20 -21

of the sword,"⁷²² others "were slain with the sword."⁷²³ What then shall we say of this terrible conflict in which all humanity is involved? First, things are not what they seem. It was so at Calvary. What seemed a terrible defeat to the disciples was, in fact, the greatest victory of time and eternity! The cross is only one side of the coin; the empty tomb is the other. The divisions of the church which we see in history are not the reality of the Church in Christ. For as God is One in essence and undivided, so too the Church exists undivided in Christ, as a mystical entity. While some servants escaped the toils of the wicked and others were destroyed by them, the writer to Hebrews tells us plainly that "These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off, and were persuaded of them, and embraced them, and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth."⁷²⁴ Secondly, and concurrent with the first, is the insuperability of the work and purposes of God. Perhaps this is the most galling reality to God's adversary, namely that he is no adversary at all. He is only a created being (of great power, indeed, but) not worthy to be compared with Him Who created him. "He that sitteth in the heavens shall laugh: the Lord shall have them in derision."⁷²⁵ In the end God will out!

Waiting for Whom?

⁹⁵ The wicked have waited for me to destroy me:
But I will consider thy testimonies.



While the psalmist has pleaded his case before the LORD, for his deliverance from the wicked, he has also told us something of them. First, he tells us that the wicked have a kind of patience. "The wicked have waited for me." There is a patience in evil-doers that mirrors (in a reverse way) the patience of God. For His part, God waits for the repentance of sinners because He is unwilling that sinners should perish.⁷²⁶ But the wicked wait for the righteous because they are so desirous to achieve their nefarious end, "to destroy." Secondly their animosity, at least in this case, is personal. "The wicked have waited for **me** to destroy **me**." In the last lesson we saw how this animosity has its roots on a much deeper level than just the personalities involved. Indeed, this waiting to destroy is a biblical leitmotif from Cane and Able, to Pharaoh and the Hebrew boy children (especially Moses), to Saul and David, To Jezebel and Elijah, to Pilate and the innocents in Bethlehem, to the Pharisees and Jesus, to Saul (renamed Paul) and the Christians. The examples are many. Also, as we noted on this

⁷²² Hebrews 11:34b

⁷²³ Hebrews 11:37b

⁷²⁴ Hebrews 11:13

⁷²⁵ Psalm 2:4

⁷²⁶ 2 Peter 3:9 "The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness; but is longsuffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance."

deeper level the goal of destruction resorts to both deception and division to achieve its end. Failing this, however, there is a two-fold ploy to which the Adversary resorts in order to render the righteous ineffective: distraction and doubt. The manifest hostility of the wicked can be very troubling to God's servant. Of their hostile enemies, Jesus tells His disciples "Fear them not."⁷²⁷ But why should a natural fear of personal loss of life (or property) be avoided. The answer is obvious. When we fear the actions of evil men that are directed against us, our vision is fixed on that those whom we fear and not on the God Whom we are to serve. That explains why, in the same passage, Jesus warns His disciples to "Fear him which is able to destroy both soul and body in hell." He is saying not to be distracted because you have doubts about God's faithfulness and ability to save or to be distracted by what evil men intend against you. Rather keep your eyes on the God whom you serve ("fear Him") and be about his business. Those who threaten your life are those who would distract you from your reasonable service. Peter learned this lesson by hard experience.⁷²⁸ As long as he kept his eyes on Jesus, the life-threatening waves had no power, but as soon as he doubted Jesus and was frightened

⁷²⁷ Mt 10:16 – 42 The passage from which this quote is taken is remarkable for its unity and well worthy of our consideration though beyond the scope of this essay to comment adequately. I reproduce it here in total for your prayerful; consideration. It really does give much insight into the machinations of the wicked against the servant of the LORD.

"Behold, I send you forth as sheep in the midst of wolves: be ye therefore wise as serpents, and harmless as doves. But beware of men: for they will deliver you up to the councils, and they will scourge you in their synagogues. And ye shall be brought before governors and kings for my sake, for a testimony against them and the Gentiles. But when they deliver you up, take no thought how or what ye shall speak: for it shall be given you in that same hour what ye shall speak; for it is not ye that speak, but the Spirit of your Father which speaketh in you. And the brother shall deliver up the brother to death, and the father the child: and the children shall rise up against their parents, and cause them to be put to death. And ye shall be hated of all men for my name's sake: but he that endureth to the end shall be saved. But when they persecute you in this city, flee ye into another: for verily I say unto you, you shall not have gone over the cities of Israel, till the Son of man is come. The disciple is not above his master, nor the servant above his lord. It is enough for the disciple that he is as his master, and the servant as his lord. If they have called the master of the house Beelzebub, how much more shall they call them of his household? Fear them not therefore: for there is nothing covered, that shall not be revealed; and hid, that shall not be known. What I tell you in darkness, that speak ye in light: and what ye hear in the ear, that preach ye upon the housetops. And fear not them which kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul: but rather fear him which is able to destroy both soul and body in hell. Are not two sparrows sold for a farthing? And one of them shall not fall on the ground without your Father. But the very hairs of your head are all numbered. Fear you not therefore; ye are of more value than many sparrows. Whosoever therefore shall confess me before men, him will I confess also before my Father which is in heaven. But whosoever shall deny me before men, him will I also deny before my Father which is in heaven. Think not that I am come to send peace on earth: I came not to send peace, but a sword; for I am come to set a man at variance against his father, and the daughter against her mother, and the daughter in law against her mother in law. And a man's foes shall be they of his own household. He that loveth father or mother more than me is not worthy of me: and he that loveth son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me. And he that taketh not his cross, and followeth after me, is not worthy of me. He that findeth his life shall lose it: and he that loses his life for my sake shall find it. He that receiveth you receiveth me, and he that receiveth me receiveth him that sent me. He that receiveth a prophet in the name of a prophet shall receive a prophet's reward; and he that receiveth a righteous man in the name of a righteous man shall receive a righteous man's reward. And whosoever shall give to drink unto one of these little ones a cup of cold water only in the name of a disciple, verily I say unto you, he shall in no wise lose his reward."

⁷²⁸ Matthew 14:25 - 31 "And in the fourth watch of the night (*i.e. between 3 am and 6 am*) Jesus went unto them, walking on the sea. And when the disciples saw him walking on the sea, they were troubled, saying, 'It is a spirit'; and they cried out for fear. But straightway Jesus spake unto them, saying 'Be of good cheer; it is I; be not afraid.' And Peter answered him and said, Lord, if it be thou, bid me come unto thee on the water. And he said, Come. And when Peter was come down out of the ship, he walked on the water, to go to Jesus. But when he saw the wind boisterous, he was afraid; and beginning to sink, he cried, saying, Lord, save me. And immediately Jesus stretched forth his hand, and caught him, and said unto him, O thou of little faith, wherefore didst thou doubt?

by the wind whipped waves he began to sink. He sank because he allowed himself to be distracted. So, he, like the psalmist cried out, "Save me." It was ever thus. The service of God demands our trust that God is not only present with us but well able to deliver us from every form of evil directed against us.

All this sheds light on the second statement of the psalmist in this verse, "The wicked have waited for me... but I will consider thy testimonies." He is saying, in effect, that the wicked have been waiting for me, but that he will go on waiting on God. The psalmist has resolved as a deliberate act of the will not to focus on those who threaten him, not on saving his life but rather to focus on reflecting on God's testimonies. He is willing rather to lose 'his life for thy sake' knowing that "Thy loving-kindness is better than life."⁷²⁹ While deception, division, and destruction have wrought much harm communally, it is distraction by the hostile visages, words, and attitudes of evil doers, which has proven most effective on the individual level. "The fear of man bringeth a snare: but whoso puts his trust in the LORD shall be safe."⁷³⁰ Jeremiah tells us that, at the start of his ministry, "...the LORD said unto me, Say not, I am a child: for thou shalt go to all that I shall send thee, and whatsoever I command thee thou shalt speak. Be not afraid of their faces: for I am with thee to deliver thee, saith the LORD."⁷³¹ For Jeremiah the distraction had two possible sources: himself ("Say not, I am a child", i.e. do not think to say that I am inadequate to the task which you have given to me) and the hostile nature of his audiences ("Be not afraid of their faces"). Each of us, as we pursue those tasks appointed to us as servants of God; face the same distractions from within and without. And the answer must be the same for us as it was for Paul as God committed the communication of the Gospel. "Not that we are sufficient of ourselves to think anything as of ourselves; but our sufficiency is of God; Who also hath made us able ministers of the new testament; not of the letter, but of the spirit: for the letter killeth, but the spirit giveth life."⁷³²

⁷²⁹ Psalm 63: 1-4 O God, thou art my God;
 Early will I seek thee:
My soul thirsteth for thee,
 My flesh longeth for thee
In a dry and thirsty land,
 Where no water is;
To see thy power and thy glory,
 So as I have seen thee in the sanctuary.
Because thy loving-kindness is better than life,
 My lips shall praise thee.
Thus will I bless thee while I live:
 I will lift up my hands in thy name.

⁷³⁰ Proverbs 29:25

⁷³¹ Jeremiah 1:7-8

⁷³² 2 Corinthians 3:5-6

The Moment of Truth

⁹⁶ I have seen an end of all perfection:
But thy commandment is exceeding broad.



Recently I attended a retrospective of the works of Valentin de Boulogne, a little-known French painter living in Italy who followed after and built upon the work of Caravaggio. Besides his consummate skill as a painter, his genius lay in involving the viewer in the painting, often by presenting one of the foreground figures with their back to the viewer. He also had the remarkable ability of painting the human visage in such a way that the viewer was challenged to look beyond the action of the scene into the very souls of the participants. His paintings encouraged reflection on the human condition. Many of his paintings were based on biblical stories, particularly those found in the gospels. In each story, he chose the very moment that was central to the tale, what we might call 'the moment of truth'; that scene toward which the story built and from which it would descend to its conclusion. In the case of the woman taken in adultery, for example, he chooses the moment in which the accusers have finished putting forth their condemnation (and trap) for Jesus and just before He answers their wickedness and shows mercy and grace to the unfortunate woman. In the scene, Jesus is stooping to write on the ground the first time.⁷³³



The moment of truth, the moment when one sees a truth for the first time, is also the moment when we change our minds, when we repent. Without seeing the truth, real

⁷³³ John 8:2 - 11 And early in the morning he came again into the temple, and all the people came unto him; and he sat down, and taught them. And the scribes and Pharisees brought unto him a woman taken in adultery; and when they had set her in the midst, they say unto him, Master, this woman was taken in adultery, in the very act. Now Moses in the law commanded us, that such should be stoned: but what sayest thou? This they said, tempting him that they might have to accuse him. But Jesus stooped down, and with his finger wrote on the ground, as though he heard them not. So when they continued asking him, he lifted up himself, and said unto them, He that is without sin among you, let him first cast a stone at her. And again he stooped down, and wrote on the ground. And they which heard it, being convicted by their own conscience, went out one by one, beginning at the eldest, even unto the last: and Jesus was left alone, and the woman standing in the midst. When Jesus had lifted up himself, and saw none but the woman, he said unto her, Woman, where are those thine accusers? Hath no man condemned thee? She said, No man, Lord. And Jesus said unto her, neither do I condemn thee: go, and sin no more.

repentance is not possible. This particularly involves seeing the truth about ourselves and about God. Job experienced such enlightenment. "I have heard of thee by the hearing of the ear: but now mine eye seeth thee. Wherefore I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes."⁷³⁴ It lay at the root of Peter's bitter tears.⁷³⁵ The verse before us marks such a moment, and it follows as the consequence of all that God has been showing to the psalmist in His classroom. As we observed when we began this octave, לָמַד – LAMED means to teach. In ancient times לָמַד stood for a shepherd's staff or an ox goad, the instrument that encouraged animals to go in the direction that the shepherd wanted. That direction usually, if not always, is one toward which the scholar is not inclined, willing or able to go apart from God's grace.⁷³⁶ From this we may infer that at least one goal of divine education is true repentance as well as faith. Looked at in this way, the question about the verse in hand becomes: exactly what does the psalmist see? He tells us simply "I have seen an end of all perfection." This is a statement about the psalmist's personal human experience ("I have seen ..."). It is a statement about finitude ("I have seen an end..."). It is a statement of universality ("I have seen an end of all..."). Finally, it is a statement about a great class of things ("I have seen an end of all perfection"). All things, material or immaterial, have a beginning and most current materialities also have an end. Things with a beginning and an ending are finite. Things (like the human soul) that have a beginning but no end are finite but everlasting. Only God is eternal, without beginning or end. Everything has its limits and learning what those limits are can be very painful, particularly when it comes to our human limitations. Yet it is precisely this understanding (that we do not know everything, that we cannot do everything, and that we cannot understand everyone's feelings) which makes us serviceable to God as instruments of His mercy and grace. Prayer is, in this sense, the confession of our helplessness and utter need for God. And in light of that, learning in God's classroom is learning to pray. When we understand that everything has an end, everything has limitations, we come to our 'right mind' about ourselves and about our Father in Heaven.⁷³⁷ Seeing an end of all perfection means seeing Him whose perfection has no end - and being drawn to Him!

The first verset paints the backdrop for the second. In contradistinction to "the end of all perfection", the psalmist has also seen, "... thy commandment is exceeding broad." There are depths of God as He has chosen to reveal Himself to us that defy all humanity

⁷³⁴ Job 42:5-6

⁷³⁵ Matthew 26:74-75 Then began he to curse and to swear, saying, I know not the man. And immediately the cock crew. And Peter remembered the word of Jesus, which said unto him, Before the cock crow, thou shalt deny me thrice. And he went out, and wept bitterly.

⁷³⁶ We have echoes of this in Paul's conversion, where Paul, blinded by the Lord cries out "Who art thou, Lord?" And the Lord said, "I am Jesus whom thou persecutest. It is hard for thee to kick against the pricks." Acts 9:5 ("to kick against the pricks" i.e. to resist or kick against the prodding of God leading him to faith in Jesus Christ)

⁷³⁷ Luke 15:17 "When he came to his senses, he said, 'How many of my father's hired men have food to spare, and here I am starving to death! (NIV)

to plumb. Just as God has no end, so we can never get to the end of His revelation of Himself. Does this mean that we give up learning? Does the vast ocean that stretches before the shore-bound girl; seashell in hand, discourage her curiosity from discovering wonders hidden in its great deeps? Does the limitless velvet night sky discourage the earth-bound boy; telescope in hand, from wanting to become a space traveler? That there is no end to the revelation of God only excites that insatiable hunger for Him that He built into us when He created us, not to discourage us, but to draw us unto Himself. To discover such a yearning is to discover the love of God for us, "You have made us for yourself, O Lord, and our heart is restless until it rests in you."⁷³⁸

⁷³⁸ Confessions of St. Augustine Book 1

מ (MEM)

☞ *The Psalmist's Heart* ☛

97 O how love I thy law!
It is my meditation all the day.

☞ *The Psalmist's Mind and Will* ☛

98 Thou through thy commandments hast made me wiser
than mine enemies:

For they are ever with me

99 I have more understanding than all my teachers:
For thy testimonies are my meditation.

100 I understand more than the ancients,
Because I keep thy precepts.

101 I have refrained my feet from every evil way,
That I might keep thy word

102 I have not departed from thy judgments:
For thou hast taught me

☞ *The Psalmist's Delight* ☛

103 How sweet are thy words unto my taste!
Yea, sweeter than honey to my mouth!

104 Through thy precepts I get understanding
Therefore I hate every false way.

☞

מ - Mem means water. Its original pictogram was like our modern capital M, which looks like the waves of the sea, and originally connoted a vast, unsearchable, and frightening body of water prone to chaotic storms. It carried the connotation of chaos and destruction.⁷³⁹ Water is involved both with blessing and judgment, life and death. Too much water (Noah's flood) or too little water (drought) means life will die. When God would bless His obedient people, He controls the flow of water by sending the early and latter rains in just the right amount and in just the right time.⁷⁴⁰ We note again

⁷³⁹ We find this sense in the very first lines of the Bible: "In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth. And the earth was without form, and void; and darkness was upon the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters." (Genesis 1:1-2) The deep is תהום (pronounced teh-home') from a primitive root meaning to cause an uproar. Hence it means an abyss as in a surging mass of water especially the deep (i.e. the main sea or the subterranean water-supply). The word water used here is מים mayim, (pronounced mah'-yim) meaning water, the word that מ - mem signifies.

⁷⁴⁰ Deuteronomy 11:10-14 For the land, whither thou goest in to possess it, is not as the land of Egypt, from whence ye came out, where thou sowedst thy seed, and wateredst it with thy foot, as a garden of herbs: But the land, whither ye go to possess it, is a land of hills and valleys, and drinketh water of the rain of heaven: A land which the LORD thy God careth for: the eyes of the LORD thy God are always upon it, from the beginning of the year even unto the end of the year. And it shall come to pass, if ye shall hearken diligently unto my commandments which I command you this day, to love the LORD your God, and to serve him with all your

that this psalm is concerned with just that, a blessed life. (1, 2) But the blessed spiritual life is not dependant upon physical water but rather every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God.⁷⁴¹ So there is a correspondence between material life which depends on the water that God sends and spiritual life which depends on the words that God speaks. It is this parabolic equivalence that lies behind the apparently cryptic words of our Lord Jesus when speaking to the woman of Samaria, “Whosoever drinketh of this water shall thirst again. But whosoever drinketh of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst; but the water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life.”⁷⁴² He is of course speaking of hearing and believing the words that He speaks to her and to all who will listen and believe. We find this image in Proverbs, “The words of a man's mouth are as deep waters, and the wellspring of wisdom as a flowing brook.”⁷⁴³ Jesus’ words can make us “wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus.”⁷⁴⁴

Dialogue is the lifeblood of relationship. If we think of prayer as petition, this octave contains no prayer at all. But if we think of prayer as an ongoing dialogue with God, then this octave is a single, monolithic prayer.

The Psalmist’s Heart (97): The fundamental tone of the relationship is immediately presented in terms of his affections. “O how love I thy law” (thy law: (thy תורה - torah, thy teaching). The opening provides an immediate link to the preceding octave ל – Lamed which means to teach. Here is a student in love with his teacher. And because of that love, the words that the teacher speaks are “sweet ... unto my taste; yea, sweeter than honey to my mouth!” But the psalmist’s emotions relative to God find an answer to that which is not of God “O how love I thy law (97a)... Therefore, I hate every false way (104b)” The affective tone of the psalmist’s heart relationship brackets and undergirds the entire octave.

Cognition and Volition - The Psalmist’s Mind and Will (98 – 102): The dynamics of this octave center on the teacher - student relationship. In this relationship, God speaks but the student does more than listen. He meditates. “Thy law...is my meditation all the day (97b) ...thy testimonies are my meditation. (99b)” Love for the teacher gives rise to a desire for His words that is likened to the taste’s desire for the sweetness of honey.

heart and with all your soul, That I will give you the rain of your land in his due season, the first rain and the latter rain, that thou mayest gather in thy corn, and thy wine, and thine oil.

⁷⁴¹ Deuteronomy 8:3 and Matthew 4:4 “Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God.”

⁷⁴² John 4:13,14 See also John 7:37-39 “In the last day, that great day of the feast, Jesus stood and cried, saying, If any man thirst, let him come unto me, and drink. He that believeth on me, as the scripture hath said, out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water. (But this spake he of the Spirit, which they that believe on him should receive: for the Holy Ghost was not yet given; because that Jesus was not yet glorified.) The words of the believer are the overflow of the ministry of the indwelling Holy Spirit (the well or fount of living water) capable of ministering life to all who will receive the Believer’s proclamation of the Gospel in faith.

⁷⁴³ Proverbs 18:4

⁷⁴⁴ 2 Timothy 3:15 And that from a child thou hast known the holy scriptures, which are able to make thee wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus.

The desire for the soul to ingest the words of God is not unlike the mouth's desire to ingest honey because of its sweetness. Love gives rise to desire, and desire gives rise to meditation. With meditation comes that wonderful moment of illumination or internalization⁷⁴⁵ when wisdom and understanding emerge in the soul. And this internal transformation by the Master's words has a life changing effect in terms of the psalmist's cognition and volition.

While God may have used human teachers and wise men (ancients) in the psalmist's life; because God's Law (the Torah) is his meditation all the day (97), God's commandments have made him wiser than his enemies (98a). Because the God's testimonies are his meditation (99b), he considers situations more wisely (with greater circumspection) than his teachers (99a). Because he continually guides his thought by God's precepts (100b), he has greater consideration and discretion than his teachers' teachers (the ancients – 100b)⁷⁴⁶

Internal transformations have external consequences. The psalmist makes several assertions about what he has done. "I have refrained from every evil way" (101a); I keep thy word (101b); and I have not departed from thy judgments (102a). A cursory reading of this octave might lead us to look at the psalmist's prayer as being similar to the boastful Pharisee of whom Jesus spoke.⁷⁴⁷ But such a view both distorts what the psalmist is actually saying and omits much that the Pharisee never says. In the Pharisee's 'prayer' no mention is made whatever of what God has done for him, only what he thinks he has done for God. The Pharisee's prayer is egocentric and proud, while the psalmist's prayer is not. The psalmist knows that his relationship with the LORD is wholly dependant on God. Far from being the boasting, self centered Pharisee, the center section of the octave presents the psalmist's testimony of the transforming effects of God's word within. It is actually a discussion of the nature of that life changing relationship; a relationship which lies at the center of this entire psalm and drives it like a spring drives a clock. The volitional assertions are all cause and effect in nature, but are not identical: an inward reward caused by an external action: "I understand ... because I keep."(100); an internal decision made for an external reason: "I have refrained ... that I might keep."(101); and the fundamental dynamic of the relationship: "I have not departed from thy judgments: for thou hast taught me."(102)

⁷⁴⁵ Psalm 119:130 "The entrance of thy words giveth light; it giveth understanding unto the simple."

⁷⁴⁶ In 99a he uses the word שָׂכַל sakal, (pronounced saw-kal') meaning to consider with circumspection and wisdom. In 100a he uses the word בִּיַן biyn, (pronounced bene) a primitive root meaning to separate or distinguish things mentally (generally) to understand, to consider, to discern. It seems to convey an even greater (more ancient) sagacity than שָׂכַל - sakal.

⁷⁴⁷ A contrast in prayers was presented by Jesus in Luke 18:10-14. "Two men went up into the temple to pray; the one a Pharisee, and the other a publican. The Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself, God, I thank thee, that I am not as other men are, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this publican. I fast twice in the week; I give tithes of all that I possess. And the publican, standing afar off, would not lift up so much as his eyes unto heaven, but smote upon his breast, saying, God be merciful to me a sinner. I tell you, this man went down to his house justified rather than the other: for every one that exalteth himself shall be abased; and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted."

Love begets desire; desire begets meditation; meditation begets transforming enlightenment (wisdom and understanding); and transforming enlightenment begets obedience (keeping thy word). What has all this to do with מ (mem) ~ water? We need only look to the nearest oasis for the answer.

“Blessed is the man that walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly,
Nor standeth in the way of sinners,
Nor sitteth in the seat of the scornful
But his delight is in the law of the LORD;
And in his law doth he meditate day and night.
And he shall be like a tree planted by the rivers of water,
That bringeth forth his fruit in his season;
His leaf also shall not wither;
And whatsoever he doeth shall prosper.”⁷⁴⁸

The Psalmist’s Delight (103 – 104): Finally the psalmist speaks of his desire. He desires Thy words (103a) like children desire sweets. His desire springs from the spiritual digestion that gives him greater בִּינָה *biyn*: understanding or discernment. He considers every proposed way of blessing with discernment, seeing that many, while promising blessing, lead only to death. For the person who finds God’s precepts sweet as honey, the sin of every false way will always be hateful and bitter.⁷⁴⁹ At last we must ask whence has the psalmist such great wisdom? Has it come from men? Jeremiah tells us that the LORD is the fountain of living waters. “O LORD, the hope of Israel, all that forsake thee shall be ashamed, and they that depart from me shall be written in the earth, because they have forsaken the LORD, the fountain of living waters.”⁷⁵⁰ In the end, here as in Aleph, the psalmist has been seeking to drink of that fountain of living waters, Jesus Christ.

Discovering Love

⁹⁶ I have seen an end of all perfection:
But thy commandment is exceeding broad.

מ (MEM)

⁹⁷ O how love I thy law!
It is my meditation all the day.



⁷⁴⁸ Psalm 1:1-3

⁷⁴⁹ Proverbs 14:12 and 16:25 “There is a way which seemeth right unto a man, but the end thereof are the ways of death.” The writer to the Hebrews describes much the same thing when he describes spiritual maturity. “For when for the time ye ought to be teachers, ye have need that one teach you again which be the first principles of the oracles of God; and are become such as have need of milk, and not of strong meat. For every one that useth milk is unskillful in the word of righteousness: for he is a babe. But strong meat belongeth to them that (*like the psalmist*) are of full age, even those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil.” Hebrews 5:12-14

⁷⁵⁰ Jeremiah 17:13

Whereas ל – lamed means goad and points to teaching (and learning in God’s classroom), מ – MEM means water and speaks both of judgment unto death (as in the case of Noah’s flood) and mercy unto life (as in the case of God’s rain falling on the just and unjust⁷⁵¹). As we noted in the introduction, dialogue is the lifeblood of relationship. If we think of prayer as petition, this octave contains no prayer at all. But if we think of prayer as an ongoing dialogue with God, then this octave is a single, monolithic prayer. In it the psalmist tells God how much His law, commandments, testimonies, precepts, words, and judgments have all meant in his life. They have made him wiser than his enemies (98a), given him more understanding than his teachers (99a), furnished an unending source of sweet meditation (and joy – 99b & 103), given him more understanding than the ancients (100a), and enabled him to refrain his steps from every evil way (101a). And all this is his because “thou hast taught me.” All of us have had human teachers. Some of those have had a material effect for good on our lives. Though we are no longer in their classroom or under their instruction, we remember them with great affection for their beneficence to us. This octave bears the exact same relation to the preceding octave as the former student bears to their old teacher. The student has “graduated.” He has finally “seen an end of all perfection.” He finally ‘gets it.’ But along with graduation has come the realization that he can never stop learning, nor should he. There are unfathomable depths in the God whom he adores and who has been his shepherd-teacher. He testifies that although he has personally seen that all perfection has an end, “thy commandment is exceeding broad.”

This set of verses which spans these two octaves also tell us another great truth that academics understand about higher learning. The difference between a student and a scholar is their love of their subject. While the psalmist may have been a student in God’s class room, he has come out a scholar who testifies with great joy, “O how I love thy law! ⁷⁵² It is my meditation all the day.” Students must be goaded (ל), until they begin to find their joy not in their teacher’s approval but in the very act of learning. The reward of learning has been internalized as an expression of self-development and fulfillment. Their joy is the very joy of life (מ).

It is ironic in the spiritual life that what we are in relation to God (our limitations of thought, feeling, and will in relation to His omniscience, compassion, and omnipotence) which were so painful to discover; should be a prelude to life’s greatest joy. The moment of truth can be seen as the birth-pang of a new life in God! Here is the mystery of the healing of the broken heart, the comfort of the contrite spirit. Here is the

⁷⁵¹ Matthew 5:43-45 “Ye have heard that it hath been said, Thou shalt love thy neighbour, and hate thine enemy. But I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you; That ye may be the children of your Father which is in heaven: for he maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust.”

⁷⁵² Thy law – thy Torah: literally thy teaching

discovery that the way down is the way up; that humiliation is only the precursor to glorification. It is the mindset that is consciously urged upon us by the apostle Paul who commands us to:

“Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus: Who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God: But made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men: And being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross. Wherefore God also hath highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name: That at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth; And that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.”⁷⁵³

But such a painful transformation, such anguish as we come to our right minds, such suffering contrition in repentance often happens only in the extremity of trial, when we come to personally see “an end of all perfection.” For many, it is like the personal experience of Peter,⁷⁵⁴ Paul,⁷⁵⁵ and the Prodigal.⁷⁵⁶ But what new desire and delight, what new *joie de vie*, comes in the place of former desires and delights? Just one, supreme object of devotion: God, Himself, as He has chosen to reveal Himself to us. For the psalmist it was Torah: O how I love thy Torah, thy law. For the Christian, it is the person of Jesus Christ, “Who is the brightness of his glory, and the express image of his person”⁷⁵⁷

It was the sight of thy dear cross
First weaned my soul from earthly things

⁷⁵³ Philippians 2:5-11

⁷⁵⁴ Matthew 26:74 - 75 “Then began he to curse and to swear, saying, I know not the man. And immediately the cock crew. And Peter remembered the word of Jesus, which said unto him, Before the cock crow, thou shalt deny me thrice. And he went out, and wept bitterly.”

⁷⁵⁵ Acts 9:1-6a “And Saul, yet breathing out threatenings and slaughter against the disciples of the Lord, went unto the high priest, And desired of him letters to Damascus to the synagogues, that if he found any of this way, whether they were men or women, he might bring them bound unto Jerusalem. And as he journeyed, he came near Damascus: and suddenly there shined round about him a light from heaven: And he fell to the earth, and heard a voice saying unto him, Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me? And he said, Who art thou, Lord? And the Lord said, I am Jesus whom thou persecutest: it is hard for thee to kick against the pricks. (*remember - 5*) And he trembling and astonished said, Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?...”

⁷⁵⁶ Luke 15:14 - 24 “And when he had spent all, there arose a mighty famine in that land; and he began to be in want. And he went and joined himself to a citizen of that country; and he sent him into his fields to feed swine. And he would fain have filled his belly with the husks that the swine did eat: and no man gave unto him. **And when he came to himself**, he said, How many hired servants of my father's have bread enough and to spare, and I perish with hunger! I will arise and go to my father, and will say unto him, ‘Father, I have sinned against heaven, and before thee, and am no more worthy to be called thy son: make me as one of thy hired servants.’ And he arose, and came to his father. But when he was yet a great way off, his father saw him, and had compassion, and ran, and fell on his neck, and kissed him. And the son said unto him, Father, I have sinned against heaven, and in thy sight, and am no more worthy to be called thy son. But the father said to his servants, Bring forth the best robe, and put it on him; and put a ring on his hand, and shoes on his feet: And bring hither the fatted calf, and kill it; and let us eat, and be merry: For this my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found.”

⁷⁵⁷ Hebrews 1:1 -3 “God, who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets, Hath in these last days spoken unto us by his Son, whom he hath appointed heir of all things, by whom also he made the worlds; Who being the brightness of his glory, and the express image of his person, and upholding all things by the word of his power, when he had by himself purged our sins, sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high;

And taught me to esteem as dross
The mirth of fools, and pomp of kings.

- William Cowper

Wisdom

⁹⁸ Your commands make me wiser than my enemies,
For they are ever with me (NIV)



This verse centers on wisdom. The point of education (ב) is to prepare us for life (ח). And the ability to live life well requires wisdom. But the life that the psalmist actually lives is hardly a paradise. It is a very real life among very evil people, who lie in wait for him to destroy him. "The wicked have waited for me to destroy me: but I will consider thy testimonies."⁷⁵⁸ The action that the psalmist takes in response to the nefarious plots of the wicked does not seem to be wise at all, on first glance. If this were a play, we might be tempted to call out, "Watch your step! Pay attention to what's going on around you! Be aware of your surroundings! Take care!" Instead, the psalmist is telling us that when the wicked did what they did, he chose to pay attention to God's testimonies and not to them directly. But in this verse, he tells us that his actions really were wise; wiser, in fact, than those very adversaries who sought his ruin. The wisdom, in which he exalts, is relative to that of the wicked. He is "wiser than my enemies." The instrumentality of that wisdom is "your commands".

To better understand this verse, we must ask ourselves exactly what the psalmist means by wisdom. Clearly safety is implied, but is that all? The Bible presents three closely linked concepts, especially in proverbs: knowledge, understanding, and wisdom.⁷⁵⁹ Knowledge involves being. It has to do with the nature of things, how they are. Usually in the Bible knowledge refers to the nature of God, how God is. This is called the knowledge of God or 'the knowledge of the Holy'. Understanding involves actions. It has to do with how things that exist interact or work together, particularly with how God has caused their interconnectedness and interaction. Hence, we are told that "the knowledge of the Holy One is understanding."⁷⁶⁰ Wisdom, for its part, has to do with the ends of things. If, for example, a particular course of action is chosen, we do well to ask how it will end. Again, we are told, "There is a way that seems right to a man, but

⁷⁵⁸ Psalm 119:95

⁷⁵⁹ Proverbs 2:1-9 My son, if thou wilt receive my words, and hide my commandments with thee; So that thou incline thine ear unto wisdom, and apply thine heart to understanding; Yea, if thou criest after knowledge, and liftest up thy voice for understanding; If thou seekest her as silver, and searchest for her as for hid treasures; Then shalt thou understand the fear of the LORD, and find the knowledge of God. For the LORD giveth wisdom: out of his mouth cometh knowledge and understanding. He layeth up sound wisdom for the righteous: he is a buckler to them that walk uprightly. He keepeth the paths of judgment, and preserveth the way of his saints. Then shalt thou understand righteousness, and judgment, and equity; yea, every good path.

⁷⁶⁰ Proverbs 9:10 "The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom, and knowledge of the Holy One is understanding." (NIV)

in the end it leads to death.”⁷⁶¹ Coming back to the implication of safety mentioned above, we can see that safety is clearly a desirable end in the choice of a path. So, wisdom has to do with directing the psalmist into a particular course of action (“but I will consider thy testimonies.”) that will end in safety from the plot of the wicked but one that is often counter-intuitive to our sense of what is wise. This counter-intuitive nature of divine wisdom rooted in the instruction of God explains admonitions like “Trust in the LORD with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding. In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths.”⁷⁶² It also surfaces in the New Testament when Paul tells the Christians at Corinth that, “the foolishness of God is wiser than men.”⁷⁶³

If we accept the notion that wisdom has to do with the ends of things, then the psalmist’s concluding statement in **5** is clearly a statement about wisdom as it is conveyed in God’s commandments: “I have seen an end of all perfection: but thy commandment is exceeding broad.” For the psalmist, in this age of the law, wisdom (i.e. coming to a desirable end) had to do with the commandments of God. Those commandments provided direction in the way the individual should go. Hence the commandment which is exceeding broad (i.e. far reaching) points far down in time past ‘the end of all perfection’ to desirable ends, blessed ends, to supreme happiness. Having seen this, we need not wonder why the psalmist tells us that it is the very instrumentality of those commandments that have made him wiser than those who, counter to God’s commandments, seek to do him ill. The commandments, like everything else begin with God and end with God. Everyone must answer to God! ⁷⁶⁴

But is the wisdom of which the psalmist speaks only in a far distant time? Is his vindication only to be at the judgment seat of God? The answer suggested throughout this psalm is clearly ‘No’. Obedience to God’s commands is not only pleasing to God and beneficial in the long run, but it is a manifestation of the psalmist’s proper relationship with Him. As we saw in 94a, he protests “I am thine, save me...”. The

⁷⁶¹ Proverbs 14:12 (NIV) The recurrence of these themes in the poetic books of the Old Testament is the reason the books of Job, Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and Song of Solomon are called ‘the wisdom books’.

⁷⁶² Proverbs 3:5-6

⁷⁶³ 1 Corinthians 1:25 “Because the foolishness of God is wiser than men; and the weakness of God is stronger than men.”

The Apostle goes on to describe this wisdom of God in contradistinction to that of men: “And my speech and my preaching was not with enticing words of man’s wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power: that your faith should not stand in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God. Howbeit we speak wisdom among them that are perfect: yet not the wisdom of this world, nor of the princes of this world, that come to nought. But we speak the wisdom of God in a mystery, even the hidden wisdom, which God ordained before the world unto our glory” (1 Corinthians 2:4 – 7)

While the assertion of the psalmist “Thou through thy commandments hast made me wiser than mine enemies”, does not address this critical difference explicitly, nevertheless in linking the wisdom taught of God with the wicked, who doubtless felt that they too were wise in their own self directed cleverness, the contrast is implied.

⁷⁶⁴ John 1:1 - 3 In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. The same was in the beginning with God. All things were made by him; and without him was not any thing made that was made.

Hebrews 9:27 “...it is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment...”

Revelation 1:11 “... I am Alpha and Omega, the first and the last...”

psalmist's relationship is not only covenantal, it is mutual. The psalmist has every right to believe that God will not only protect him but guide him to a desired, blessed end, for His name's sake.⁷⁶⁵ As we have noted, the hostility of the wicked against the psalmist is really a presenting symptom of a far deeper animosity of Satan toward God, and that 'contest' is not a contest at all. "He that sitteth in the heavens shall laugh: the Lord shall have them in derision."⁷⁶⁶

How then does this assertion of the psalmist apply to us? As elsewhere, the One of whom the law speaks is the same who is made unto us wisdom and many other things.

*"But God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; and God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty; And base things of the world, and things which are despised, hath God chosen, yea, and things which are not, to bring to nought things that are: That no flesh should glory in his presence. But of him are ye in Christ Jesus, who of God is made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption: That, according as it is written, He that glorieth, let him glory in the Lord."*⁷⁶⁷

Marvelous Murmuring

⁹⁹ I have more understanding than all my teachers:
For thy testimonies are my meditation.



In this verse the psalmist turns his focus from his enemies to his teachers. The former hate him and want to destroy him. The latter love him and desire his wellbeing. But human teaching can only go so far. Life is sometimes like a puzzle. The 'pieces' lay in front of us. They are many. We set about turning them over and try to piece them together. We hope they are all there. We believe that they will all fit, and when we are done that we will see the somewhat complex but beautiful picture whose pieces often deceived us into thinking they belonged somewhere else. In a puzzle we seek not only the beauty of the big picture but also the unity of all the bits and pieces that we started with. It is with a sense of accomplishment and satisfaction that we place the last piece into its proper place before we step back to enjoy the fruit of our labors in integration. As noted last time, understanding has to do with how things that exist interact or work together, particularly with how God has caused their interconnectedness and interaction. Interaction therefore involves action in concert with other actions going on around us. It is this understanding of 'how the world works' that lies at the root of Solomon's wisdom. If we understand that certain actions of nature proceed in a cyclic

⁷⁶⁵ Psalm 23:1a,3b "The LORD is my shepherd; ... he leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for his name's sake."

⁷⁶⁶ Psalm 2:4

⁷⁶⁷ 1 Corinthians 1:27-31

pattern,⁷⁶⁸ then we will also understand that there are appropriate times for us to be involved, to play our part in those cycles of nature, to fit successfully into the jig-saw puzzle of life.⁷⁶⁹ Such a view casts God as the master puzzle maker. It is He who creates the clockworks of nature. But this verse again tells us that He is not an absentee mechanic. He is like a loving Father who has built a maze for a dear child, not to frustrate him in confusion, but to engage him in a delightful activity whose success is dependent not just on the child's ability to reason, but on the child's ability to listen to his Father's whispered instructions and to work out the clues as to how everything fits together. Such listening is really an expression of love on the part of the one traversing the maze of life or piecing together its many and varied pieces. But solving the puzzle, traversing the maze, is not always pleasant in its presenting experience. To a confused and distressed child (himself) unable to find his way out of the legal maze of Judaism and crying out in distress "O wretched man that I am! Who shall deliver me from the body of this death?"⁷⁷⁰ the Apostle Paul subsequently offers the comforting assurance "that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose."⁷⁷¹

Returning to the verse in hand, we see that the psalmist exults in an understanding far greater than human teachers could ever impart. He has gained this understanding not by listening to the pronouncements of men, but by meditating on "thy testimonies." The psalmist knows, by experience, the truth that "... though the Lord give you the bread of adversity, and the water of affliction, yet shall not thy teachers be removed into a corner any more, but thine eyes shall see thy teachers: and thine ears shall hear a word behind thee, saying, 'This is the way, walk ye in it', when ye turn to the right hand, and when ye turn to the left."⁷⁷²

The verse hints that there is a slight difference between hearing the word of God ("thy testimonies") and understanding (I have ...understanding). The former is a spiritual sensory experience, while the latter is a spiritual possession. How then does the psalmist 'make' the priceless treasure of the testimony of God his very own spiritual possession? The Hebrew word translated as meditation is שִׁיחָה (pronounced see-khaw')

⁷⁶⁸ Ecclesiastes 1:4 -7 One generation passeth away, and another generation cometh: but the earth abideth for ever. The sun also ariseth, and the sun goeth down, and hasteth to his place where he arose. The wind goeth toward the south, and turneth about unto the north; it whirleth about continually, and the wind returneth again according to his circuits. All the rivers run into the sea; yet the sea is not full; unto the place from whence the rivers come, thither they return again.

⁷⁶⁹ Ecclesiastes 3:1-8 To every thing there is a season, and a time to every purpose under the heaven: A time to be born, and a time to die; a time to plant, and a time to pluck up that which is planted; A time to kill, and a time to heal; a time to break down, and a time to build up; A time to weep, and a time to laugh; a time to mourn, and a time to dance; A time to cast away stones, and a time to gather stones together; a time to embrace, and a time to refrain from embracing; A time to get, and a time to lose; a time to keep, and a time to cast away; A time to rend, and a time to sew; a time to keep silence, and a time to speak; A time to love, and a time to hate; a time of war, and a time of peace.

⁷⁷⁰ Romans 7:24

⁷⁷¹ Romans 8:28

⁷⁷² Isaiah 30:20-21

is a feminine form of a word derived from a primitive root word שׁיח (pronounced see'-akh) meaning to ponder, or (by implication) to converse aloud with oneself, as when we commune, complain, declare, meditate, muse, or pray slightly audibly. Goldingay translates the word "murmur"⁷⁷³.

⁹⁹ I have gained more insight than all my tutors
Because your declarations are my murmur.

The word suggests a vibrant picture not of a sedentary child in a safe classroom setting with a human teacher lecturing on the niceties of the Torah, but a vital adult in a very complex and dangerous world who has been considering God's testimonies about how things work even while "the wicked have waited for me to destroy me."⁷⁷⁴ One can almost picture the psalmist wandering about the halls of the palace, amid plotting sycophants and traitors murmuring to himself, while paying no attention to them as he turns over some fragment of God's word, some piece of the puzzle in order to gain a new understanding of life. He is working toward that moment of realization, that moment of truth when two heretofore disparate pieces of the puzzle suddenly fit together. It is this very act of ongoing 'meditation' that allows us to make sense of the bits and pieces of our experience as they present themselves to us and to integrate them into a whole; to find inherent unity in life's experiences and make progress toward that most satisfying and useful moment when we view the "big picture." There is about such persons as the psalmist a certain distractedness that argues not disconnection from the critical issues of life but a grasp of them at a far deeper level than most people ever achieve. We find this apparent distraction in one such moment of truth that we have already noted when Jesus is confronted with the plot of the Pharisees to entrap Him with a tricky legal question regarding the woman taken in adultery.⁷⁷⁵ If He agrees with Moses, they can go to the Romans and accuse him of usurping the Roman power to execute. If He exonerates her, they can go to the Jews and accuse Him of slighting Moses. These were as the wicked who sought to destroy the psalmist. In this account, one has the sense that the Pharisees, coming suddenly to Jesus are interrupting His secret communion with His Father in heaven, a malicious interruption that does not disturb Him at all. He stoops down "and with his finger wrote on the ground, as though he heard them not." Impatient to have their 'victory', the continue asking for an

⁷⁷³ Goldingay, *Psalms* Vol 3. page 418

⁷⁷⁴ Psalm 119:95

⁷⁷⁵ John 8:2 – 8 "... early in the morning he came again into the temple, and all the people came unto him; and he sat down, and taught them. And the scribes and Pharisees brought unto him a woman taken in adultery; and when they had set her in the midst, they say unto him, Master, this woman was taken in adultery, in the very act. Now Moses in the law commanded us, that such should be stoned: but what sayest thou? This they said, tempting him that they might have to accuse him. But Jesus stooped down, and with his finger wrote on the ground, as though he heard them not. So when they continued asking him, he lifted up himself, and said unto them, He that is without sin among you, let him first cast a stone at her. And again he stooped down, and wrote on the ground. "

answer. Jesus then rises and delivers a crushing and unexpected answer that totally foils their foolish plan. There is something that they do not understand, neither of their offered solutions works because the two puzzle pieces that they have in their hand do not fit. The one puzzle piece tells them that only the righteous can judge and the other puzzle piece tells them that they are all sinners. The reason the pieces don't fit is that their legalistic view of being right with God on the basis of the works of the law doesn't work, and never will. Then, as if these accusers meant nothing at all, He "again he stooped down, and wrote on the ground." What marvelous "murmuring"

Consider the Source

⁹⁹ I have more understanding than all my teachers:
For thy testimonies are my meditation.

¹⁰⁰ I understand more than the ancients,
Because I keep thy precepts.



Today we have many ancient documents for which scholarship has diligently produced both critical texts and comprehensive translations. The possibility exists for us to learn from these ancient sources, particularly when it comes to the things of God. Our Bible is itself a collection of 66 ancient books written over a 1500-year period. The psalm that we have been studying is almost 3000 years old! But the psalmist is not referring to this kind of "ancient." He is referring here to the very old men who sit in the gates of the villages and, based on their experience of life, render decisions in numerous social questions and conflicts.⁷⁷⁶ In both of these verses there is a nascent contrast between those whose position (teacher / elder or ancient) warrants respect for their knowledge of God and the psalmist who struggles with his relationship with God. They should be the ones 'in the know' and have everything 'in order' in their lives. But the psalmist is telling us that he has more understanding than his teachers and men who have lived quite a bit longer than he (they being 'ancient' in comparison to his age). His assertions might seem to be more youthful *braggadocio* than truth at first glance. But the nature of this psalm with its profound insights into the spiritual life argues that the psalmist is correct. He really does outshine both his teachers and the village elders in his ability to

⁷⁷⁶ Psalm 69:12a "They that sit in the gate speak against me; ..."

At the gates were the courts for public justice; there were complaints lodged, and causes heard. No doubt many vexatious complaints were made against the poor captives; and false accusations, through which they grievously suffered; so that, literally, they were often "obliged to restore that which they had not taken away." (Psalm 69:4b) - Adam Clarke's Commentary:

We also find this use of elders in the book of Ruth.

"Then went Boaz up to the gate, and sat him down there: and, behold, the kinsman of whom Boaz spake came by; unto whom he said, Ho, such a one! turn aside, sit down here. And he turned aside, and sat down. And he took ten men of the elders of the city, and said, Sit ye down here. And they sat down." (Ruth 4:1-2)

live a godly life. The contrast reminds us of another young person who amazed those much older than He.

“And when he was twelve years old, they went up to Jerusalem after the custom of the feast. And when they had fulfilled the days, as they returned, the child Jesus tarried behind in Jerusalem; and Joseph and his mother knew not of it. But they, supposing him to have been in the company, went a day’s journey; and they sought him among their kinsfolk and acquaintance. And when they found him not, they turned back again to Jerusalem, seeking him. And it came to pass, that after three days they found him in the temple, sitting in the midst of the doctors, both hearing them, and asking them questions. And all that heard him were astonished at his understanding and answers.”⁷⁷⁷

Years later, the telling question would be asked of Jesus’ teaching and miracles: “Whence hath this man this wisdom and these mighty works?”⁷⁷⁸ Returning to the verse in hand, we might well ask the same question of the psalmist. Choosing the understanding of both teachers and ancients as benchmarks against which he compares his own understanding hints at an answer to that question. Teachers customarily learn from books. Ancients learn from life experience. But the psalmist has been learning from God. *“Thy testimonies are my meditation ... I keep thy precepts.”* It is divine instruction that sets the psalmist apart from all others. But is this unique to him? Is this an assertion of ‘super-spirituality’ for a select few? The Bible clearly tells us that the answer is “no”!

Isaiah takes note of the possibility of divine instruction, as does Jeremiah. *“And **all thy children shall be taught of the LORD**; and great shall be the peace of thy children.”⁷⁷⁹ ... And they shall teach no more every man his neighbor, and every man his brother, saying, Know the LORD: for **they shall all know me, from the least of them unto the greatest of them**, saith the LORD: for I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more.”⁷⁸⁰ “*

Jesus, Himself, notes that those who were drawn to Him give evidence of the reality of divine instruction in their experience. *“No man can come to me, except the Father which hath sent me draw him: and I will raise him up at the last day. It is written in the prophets, ‘And they shall be **all taught of God.**’ **Every man therefore that hath heard, and hath learned of the Father, cometh unto me.**”⁷⁸¹*

For the psalmist, “wisdom opens up the possibility of living life in accordance with how things really are, and thus in a way that works.”⁷⁸² And ‘a way that works’ is indicative

⁷⁷⁷ Luke 2:42 – 47

⁷⁷⁸ Matthew 13:54b

⁷⁷⁹ Isaiah 54:13

⁷⁸⁰ Jeremiah 31:34

⁷⁸¹ John 6:44 – 45

⁷⁸² Goldingay comment on verse 98, *Psalms* Vol. 3, page 418

of that happy relationship with God which is central to blessedness.⁷⁸³ But relationship with God is uniquely through the person of Jesus Christ. “Jesus saith unto him, I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me.”⁷⁸⁴ For the believer, divine instruction inevitably points to Jesus Christ. If we once entertain the truth that God would have all people to be saved, then of necessity it follows that He is willing to teach all people directly. Such education has as its purpose to make people “wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus”⁷⁸⁵ The hallmarks of that remarkable instruction are not necessarily manifest in articulate expression or subtlety of thought, but rather in love and a willingness to sacrifice for others. “But as touching brotherly love ye need not that I write unto you: for ye yourselves are taught of God to love one another.”⁷⁸⁶ So too for the psalmist, the evidence of his divine instruction lies not in an ability to discourse on spiritual matters but in his obedience. “I understand more than the ancients, because *I keep thy precepts.*” Obedience borne of love⁷⁸⁷ is still the *sine qua non* of the spiritual life. But that love must be learned of God. Finally, we should realize that sanctification is not just an event, but a process as well, and that learning from God is (or should be) a daily experience in which we discover new aspects of His beloved Son and are thus transformed “from glory to glory.”⁷⁸⁸ It is this daily struggle to hear the voice of God speaking to each of us, personally, that is so challenging, exciting, and rewarding. Of course, we do well to listen to teachers and ancients, but we should never forget that they are only channels and that God’s hand is not shortened to use only human instruments. We must continually consider the source of our learning. Years have convinced me that God is often more willing to teach us directly than we are willing to learn. And that is tragic!

Walking in the Way

¹⁰¹ I have refrained my feet from every evil way,
That I might keep thy word.

¹⁰² I have not departed from thy judgments:
For thou hast taught me.



⁷⁸³ Psalm 119:1-3 “Blessed are the undefiled in the way, who walk in the law of the LORD. Blessed are they that keep his testimonies and that seek him with the whole heart. They also do no iniquity: they walk in his ways.”

⁷⁸⁴ John 14:6

⁷⁸⁵ 2 Timothy 3:15 And that from a child thou hast known the holy scriptures, which are able to make thee wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus.

⁷⁸⁶ 1 Thessalonians 4:9

⁷⁸⁷ The concept of obedience borne of love is central to Jesus’ teaching. “If ye love me, keep my commandments.” (John 14:15). But such obedience borne of love is in sharp contradistinction to the self-justifying keeping of the law of which the apostle Paul warns us from his own hard experience “... that a man is not justified by the works of the law, but by the faith of Jesus Christ, even we have believed in Jesus Christ, that we might be justified by the faith of Christ, and not by the works of the law: for by the works of the law shall no flesh be justified.” (Galatians 2:16)

⁷⁸⁸ 2 Corinthians 3:17 – 18 “Now the Lord is that Spirit: and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty. But we all, with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord.”

In the previous set of three verses, the psalmist spoke of three classes of individuals in his life: my enemies (98), my teachers (99), and ancients (100). In these two verses he turns his attention away from people to his own life. In verses 101a and 102a he speaks of his actions directly: "I have refrained my feet from every evil way ... I have not departed from thy judgments." In verses 101b and 102b he tells us why he has done these (parallel) actions: "That I might keep thy word. ... For thou hast taught me." Verse 102b further confirms what we had deduced earlier. The reason that he possessed greater wisdom than his enemies and more understanding than his teachers and the ancients is that "thou hast taught me." Both these verses make use of the metaphor of the foot path: "I have refrained my feet from every evil way." This metaphor is so familiar that it can be difficult to grasp exactly what the psalmist is saying. He is not talking about walking on a physical path. Rather he is describing the daily decisions that we all must make because life thrusts them upon us. Should I go to work this Saturday because there is so much work that I have been unable to finish? The refrigerator is nearly empty, should I go shopping or eat out. Should I gather my tax information or watch that TV show I have been hearing about? The choices are endless! Nor do we see them as particularly spiritual conflicts – moral dilemmas over which we should be wringing our hands. But if we examine each of these decisions there is behind them (1.) an understanding of how things really are, and (2.) a sense of a desirable goal state. **Understanding:** There is a so much work that I am responsible for, which I have not finished. The refrigerator is nearly empty and I can't afford to eat out. I am only three days away from the deadline for filing my taxes and I have procrastinated far too much already. **Goal State:** If I make an unwise choice, there could be serious consequences: I could get fired for not doing my job. I will go to bed hungry. The IRS will fine me. In every decision, every choice, every yes/no answer, there is an understanding of the truth about the nature of the life situation in which decision is thrust upon us and an understanding of the possible consequences of the alternative choices. Being fired, being hungry, being fined by the IRS are "evil". Being praised for doing my job, going to bed with a full stomach, and getting my tax forms in on time are "good". Associated with the metaphorical "way", there is understanding (as mentioned in v. 99 and 100) of the truth about a particular situation and wisdom (as mentioned in v. 98) that tells the psalmist the outcome of the choices he makes in terms of consequences in his life.

The descriptor "evil" associated with "way" was most likely a pragmatic descriptor for the psalmist, in much the same way that we might say to someone living in Philadelphia that going west on a road that leads to San Francisco, is not a 'good' way to get to Boston. In other words, the psalmist is telling us that he has avoided roads (taking courses of action) that would not lead him to his desired destination, end state, goal. That end state, throughout this psalm has been the blessedness of harmonious

(and unbroken) fellowship with God. "Blessed are the undefiled in the way, who walk in the law of the LORD. ... They walk in his ways."⁷⁸⁹ The psalmist is not thinking here of "quality of his life" issues as in unemployment, hunger or fines (as above). Quality of life is our modern term. Rather he sees fellowship with God as life itself. So should we. Jesus tells His followers, "This is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent." He tells the disciples this as He goes forth to betrayal, capture, torment, and death on the cross in order to open that very way to life eternal.⁷⁹⁰

If, at this point we step back, we can observe that there are three related terms, though not identical, that are nascent in this "foot – way" metaphor: the way, the truth, and the life. This triad is immediately recognizable because of Jesus' bold assertion: "I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me."⁷⁹¹

The Way of Truth: As we described, the truth underlies all sound decisions particularly in the way leading to God. Correctly understanding how things interrelate is essential to the decisions we make: when to work, when to stay home, when to shop, when to eat out, when to prepare our taxes, when to watch TV, when to plant, when to sow, when to rejoice, when to weep, when to gather things together and when to get rid of stuff. Truth is essential for just judgments. God's judgments (verse 102a) are just because true. They are true because God is light.⁷⁹² So the way under girded or directed by the truth is styled "the way of truth"⁷⁹³

The Way of Life: If truth undergirds and directs the "feet" (decisions) of the psalmist, life in God is his desired end. Any way (any course of successive decisions) that leads to God is good. In this sense the word good goes far beyond merely a practical appellation. Because God is Holy, any way that leads to Him must be marked by moral goodness. Hence, the way that leads to God is styled "the way of life."⁷⁹⁴ As noted, decisions are generally thrust upon us by circumstances and the psalmist knows that those

⁷⁸⁹ Verses 1, 3b

⁷⁹⁰ Heb 10:19 - 22 Having therefore, brethren, boldness to enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way, which he hath consecrated for us, through the veil, that is to say, his flesh; and having an high priest over the house of God; let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience, and our bodies washed with pure water.

⁷⁹¹ John 14:6

⁷⁹² 1 John 1:5 "This then is the message which we have heard of him, and declare unto you, that God is light, and in him is no darkness at all." Hence the psalmist will say "Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path." (Psalm 119:105)

⁷⁹³ Ps 119:29 - 30 "Remove from me the way of lying; and grant me thy law graciously. I have chosen the way of truth: thy judgments have I laid before me. See also 2 Peter 2:2 "And many shall follow their pernicious ways; by reason of whom the way of truth shall be evil spoken of.

⁷⁹⁴ Proverbs 6:20 - 23 "My son, keep thy father's commandment, and forsake not the law of thy mother: bind them continually upon thine heart, and tie them about thy neck. When thou goest, it shall lead thee; when thou sleepest, it shall keep thee; and when thou awakest, it shall talk with thee. For the commandment is a lamp; and the law is light; and reproofs of instruction are the way of life." ... Proverbs 10:16 - 17 "The labor of the righteous tendeth to life: the fruit of the wicked to sin. He is in the way of life that keepeth instruction: but he that refuseth reproof erreth." ... Jeremiah 21:8 "And unto this people thou shalt say, Thus saith the LORD; Behold, I set before you the way of life, and the way of death."

circumstances are part of God's kind providence. They are the walls of the 'maze' or the 'puzzle pieces' that He has ordained for our benefit. Though confusing and often painful, they nevertheless provide us opportunities that can lead to and signs that can point to: Him who is "the Way, the Truth, and the Life"; the One who assures us that, "No man cometh unto the Father, but by me." Jesus, in describing Himself by equating Himself with these three things (Way, Truth, and Life), is describing a tri-unity, because He is one person and His personhood is manifest in these three. So that when the psalmist speaks of "every evil way" he implies that there are many ways marked by various falsehoods that lead away from God. But Jesus is telling us that, just as Truth is ultimately one (i.e. singular) as well as immutable, so also the Way of Truth is one or singular. There are not many ways to God, only one – Jesus. Furthermore, there are not many 'forms of life'. There is only one goal – Life in God; and Jesus is the only Way of Life. In effect we are being told that everything present in the Bible, ultimately speaks to us of Jesus. "Search the scriptures; for in them ye think ye have eternal life: and they are they which testify of me. And ye will not come to me, that ye might have life."⁷⁹⁵ If we fail to see Him there, we miss not only the mark, but Life in God.

Sweet and Bitter

...thou hast taught me.

¹⁰³ How sweet are thy words unto my taste!

Yea, sweeter than honey to my mouth!



There is an apocryphal story about cookies that were baked in the form of the letters of Hebrew alphabet. Each cookie was soaked in honey and as a child was able to recite each octave of this psalm, they were given the appropriate letter as a reward for having learned it. Whether accurate or not, the story does illustrate an important principle, that the word of God should be 'sweet to our taste.' "Thy words were found, and I did eat them; and thy word was unto me the joy and rejoicing of mine heart: for I am called by thy name, O LORD God of hosts."⁷⁹⁶ This verse looks back to the instruction of לָמַד – the ox goad. In that octave God was teaching the psalmist. Here he admits that God was his teacher, but affirms that God's instruction (thou hast taught me ... thy words) is sweeter than honey. Of all the tastes that we as individuals experience, there is none so agreeable or desired than sweet. I may have trouble encouraging my grandchildren to eat their vegetables, but chocolate requires no such encouragement. As with the footpath metaphor, the familiarity of the sweetness metaphor belies the complexity underneath. Words are not honey, and the psalmist is not talking about eating. There is

⁷⁹⁵ John 5:39-40

⁷⁹⁶ Jeremiah 15:16

a parabolic parallelism between how we survive physically by eating and spiritually by ingesting God's word. The same imagery is used by Jesus when he describes the means by which His disciples will live. "Except ye eat the flesh of the Son of man, and drink his blood, ye have no life in you."⁷⁹⁷ While Jesus' saying occasioned much debate (and misunderstanding then as now⁷⁹⁸), the connection between eating and living by 'ingesting' the word of God (or the Word of God – λογος) is the same in this verse in psalms and in the New Testament passages.

Ingesting food (i.e. hearing and accepting the word of God) is only part of the matter of sustaining life. Food must also be digested. While this may seem to be pressing the metaphor too far for this verse, nevertheless the metaphor is used in other places in scripture. Ezekiel tells us of his experience with God, Who says to him: "Son of man, cause thy belly to eat, and fill thy bowels with this roll that I give thee. Then did I eat it; and it was in my mouth as honey for sweetness."⁷⁹⁹ But the scroll itself is "written within and without: and there was written therein lamentations, and mourning, and woe." Ezekiel is told to eat and to fill his belly and his bowels with the words of the scroll. While the words seem sweet to him, he is told to tell them to rebellious Israel – to give them warnings of lamentations, and mourning, and woe, a bitter message indeed! One has the sense that although the words seemed "in my mouth as honey for sweetness" yet they would be regurgitated by the prophet as though they could not be contained in his digestive system for their bitterness. We encounter this imagery one more time near the end of the Scriptures in Revelation.

⁷⁹⁷ John 6:49 - 57 " 'Your fathers did eat manna in the wilderness, and are dead. This is the bread which cometh down from heaven, that a man may eat thereof, and not die. I am the living bread which came down from heaven: if any man eats of this bread, he shall live for ever: and the bread that I will give is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world.' The Jews therefore strove among themselves, saying, 'How can this man give us his flesh to eat?' Then Jesus said unto them, 'Verily, verily, I say unto you, Except ye eat the flesh of the Son of man, and drink his blood, ye have no life in you. Whoso eateth my flesh, and drinketh my blood, hath eternal life; and I will raise him up at the last day, for my flesh is meat indeed, and my blood is drink indeed. He that eateth my flesh, and drinketh my blood, dwelleth in me, and I in him. As the living Father hath sent me, and I live by the Father: so he that eateth me, even he shall live by me.'"

⁷⁹⁸ It is interesting to consider exactly where the controversy is so sharp between Christians – the communion, a memorial 'meal' instituted by Jesus on the night that he entered into his sufferings in relation to his crucifixion. The bread, standing for his body, and the wine, standing for his blood, look back to this very dialogue with the Pharisees over the importance of manna.

⁷⁹⁹ Ezekiel 2:6 -3:3 "And thou, son of man, be not afraid of their words, neither be afraid of their looks, though briers and thorns be with thee, and thou dost dwell among scorpions: be not afraid of their words, nor be dismayed at their looks, though they be a rebellious house. And thou shalt speak my words unto them, whether they will hear, or whether they will forbear: for they are most rebellious. But thou, son of man, hear what I say unto thee; Be not thou rebellious like that rebellious house: open thy mouth, and eat that I give thee. And when I looked, behold, an hand was sent unto me; and, lo, a roll of a book was therein; And he spread it before me; and it was written within and without: and there was written therein lamentations, and mourning, and woe.

Moreover he said unto me, Son of man, eat that thou findest; eat this roll, and go speak unto the house of Israel. So I opened my mouth, and he caused me to eat that roll. And he said unto me, Son of man, cause thy belly to eat, and fill thy bowels with this roll that I give thee. Then did I eat it; and it was in my mouth as honey for sweetness. And he said unto me, Son of man, go, get thee unto the house of Israel, and speak with my words unto them. For thou art not sent to a people of a strange speech and of an hard language, but to the house of Israel; not to many people of a strange speech and of an hard language, whose words thou canst not understand. Surely, had I sent thee to them, they would have hearkened unto thee. But the house of Israel will not hearken unto thee; for they will not hearken unto me: for all the house of Israel are impudent and hardhearted.

“And the voice which I heard from heaven spake unto me again, and said, Go and take the little book which is open in the hand of the angel which standeth upon the sea and upon the earth. And I went unto the angel, and said unto him, Give me the little book. And he said unto me, Take it, and eat it up; and it shall make thy belly bitter, but it shall be in thy mouth sweet as honey. And I took the little book out of the angel’s hand, and ate it up; and it was in my mouth sweet as honey: and as soon as I had eaten it, my belly was bitter. And he said unto me, Thou must prophesy again before many peoples, and nations, and tongues, and kings.”⁸⁰⁰

In both cases, the “mouth” that “ingested” the word of God and found it sweet to the taste, was the very mouth that would ‘regurgitate’ the word swallowed (i.e. reiterate, prophesy, warn, condemn) those people who hated God and His servants. They would find those words bitter as the poison that brings death!

Although we might question whether these extensions of the eating metaphor are appropriate in this verse, we do have the intimation that they are. If the reiteration of the word of God which psalmist has ‘eaten’ is not described, at least some hint of the interior bitterness experienced within does occur in the next verse. “Through thy precepts I get understanding; therefore, I hate every false way.” In these verses we see a transition from honey to hatred, from the affective desire for the sweetness of God’s word to the bitter hatred of every false way.

How different sweetness is from bitterness. Bitterness in the stomach causes regurgitation, and it will eventually cause the wicked lying in wait for the psalmist to hear from his very lips the sentence of their failure and ensuing doom. Yet for all this, their animosity will not abate, nor their determined hatred of the psalmist be repented of. It is as God tells Ezekiel:

“But the house of Israel will not hearken unto thee; for they will not hearken unto me: for all the house of Israel are impudent and hardhearted. Behold, I have made thy face strong against their faces, and thy forehead strong against their foreheads. As an adamant harder than flint have I made thy forehead: fear them not, neither be dismayed at their looks, though they be a rebellious house. Moreover he said unto me, Son of man, all my words that I shall speak unto thee receive in thine heart, and hear with thine ears. And go, get thee to them of the captivity, unto the children of thy people, and speak unto them, and tell them, Thus saith the Lord GOD; whether they will hear, or whether they will forbear. Then the spirit took me up, and I heard behind me a voice of a great rushing, saying, Blessed be the glory of the LORD from his place. I heard also the noise of the wings of the living creatures that touched one another, and the noise of the wheels over against them, and a noise of a great rushing. So the spirit lifted me up, and took me away, and I went in bitterness, in the heat of my spirit; but the hand of the LORD was strong upon me. Then I came to them of

⁸⁰⁰ Revelation 10:8 -11

the captivity at Telabib, that dwelt by the river of Chebar, and I sat where they sat, and remained there astonished among them seven days."⁸⁰¹

Understanding the Way

...thou hast taught me.

¹⁰⁴ Through thy precepts I get understanding:
Therefore I hate every false way.



This is the third mention of understanding in this octave. It is important to point out that there are two words translated "understanding" in these verses. The first, in verse 99, is the word שכל (pronounced saw-kal') which has the connotation of circumspection. The second in verse 100 is the word בִּין (pronounced bene) which has the connotation of discernment. The psalmist is telling us that God's testimonies have trained him to be circumspect, to look around at everything that could influence his life decisions. But the second ability, which God has given him by means of the psalmist's resolve to observe God's precepts, is the ability to discern truth from falsehood, good from evil. In this verse, the emphasis is again on "thy precepts" and the word for understanding is the later בִּין discernment.

¹⁰⁰ I understand (בִּין) more than the ancients,
Because I keep thy precepts.

...

¹⁰⁴ Through thy precepts I get understanding (בִּין):
Therefore I hate every false way.

Of course, circumspection and discernment go hand in hand. One should look carefully at everything, in order to be able to discern the difference between truth and falsehood (often half-truth) hidden in details that are easily overlooked.

As mentioned in the last lesson whether it was commandments, testimonies, or precepts, all are alike "thy words" and therefore "sweet ... unto my taste." But this last verse of the octave presents us with the corollary to that picture of sweet interior pleasure at God's instruction: bitter hatred of everything that is not of God. The psalmist describes the object of his distaste and antipathy successively as "every evil way" (101) and "every false way" (104). As noted earlier, evil in verse 101 could mean simply a pragmatic assessment of the likelihood that a particular course of action will not lead to the desired result of closer fellowship with God. But the second characterization of falsity in verse 104, leaves no room for anything other than a moral assessment of the various courses of action that daily present themselves to the psalmist. From these two

⁸⁰¹ Ezekiel 3:7 -15

assertions, we may infer two important characteristics of the choices that faced the psalmist and that still face us each day: the linkage between falsity and evil; and the multiplicity of false and evil ways in contradistinction to the singularity of the way of truth and righteousness.

The linkage between falsity and evil: The education that God would provide to His children focuses on giving them the ability to make wise life choices, choices that bring them ever closer to a life of harmonious fellowship with Him. From the very beginning the adversary sought to frustrate this end by means of lies, particularly half-truths that are lies because they omit the elements of truth. When he said “Ye shall not surely die: For God doth know that in the day ye eat thereof, then your eyes shall be opened, and ye shall be as gods, knowing good and evil.”⁸⁰² He omitted to say that you will know good *without the ability to do it* and know evil *without the ability to refrain from doing it*. This is exactly what the Apostle Paul tells us when he says “For the good that I would I do not: but the evil which I would not, that I do. ... O wretched man that I am! Who shall deliver me from the body of this death?”⁸⁰³ Paul’s cry for deliverance alerts us to the captivating effect of sin – it trammels the will or brings bondage. So, truth-telling, freedom from sin, and freedom to serve God are all bound up here.

This complex linkage is dealt with by Jesus in His dialogue with the Pharisees ensuing after His famous dictum “And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.”⁸⁰⁴ The Pharisees, who heard His statement, affirmed that they had no need of such teaching because they had a self-aggrandizing misconception that they were Abraham’s children and had never been in bondage to any man.⁸⁰⁵ Jesus systematically demonstrates, to the contrary, that based on their behavior (truth-rejecting with murderous intention): “Ye are of your father the devil, and the lusts of your father ye will do. He was a murderer from the beginning, and abode not in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaketh a lie, he speaketh of his own: for he is a liar, and the father of it.”⁸⁰⁶ There is a very clear linkage between a falsehood that deceives

⁸⁰² Genesis 3:4

⁸⁰³ Romans 7:19, 24

⁸⁰⁴ John 8:32

⁸⁰⁵ Jesus could have referred back to their subservience to Rome, but rather chooses to refute them on a much more profound level, that of their real parentage as evidenced by their sinful and unrepentant behavior.

⁸⁰⁶ John 8:34 – 47 “Jesus answered them, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Whosoever committeth sin is the servant of sin. And the servant abideth not in the house for ever: but the Son abideth ever. If the Son therefore shall make you free, ye shall be free indeed. I know that ye are Abraham’s seed; but ye seek to kill me, because my word hath no place in you. I speak that which I have seen with my Father: and ye do that which ye have seen with your father. They answered and said unto him, Abraham is our father. Jesus saith unto them, If ye were Abraham’s children, ye would do the works of Abraham. But now ye seek to kill me, a man that hath told you the truth, which I have heard of God: this did not Abraham. Ye do the deeds of your father. Then said they to him, We be not born of fornication; we have one Father, even God. Jesus said unto them, If God were your Father, ye would love me: for I proceeded forth and came from God; neither came I of myself, but he sent me. Why do ye not understand my speech? Even, because ye cannot hear my word. Ye are of your father the devil, and the lusts of your father ye will do. He was a murderer from the beginning, and abode not in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaketh a lie, he speaketh of his own: for he is a liar, and the father of it. And because I tell you the truth, ye believe me not. Which of you convinceth me of sin? And if I say the truth, why do ye not believe me? He that is of God heareth God’s words: ye therefore hear them not, because ye are not of God.”

the individual to make a spiritual and moral error and the evil that follows that wrong decision. The way of falsehood and the way of evil are really two descriptors of the same way. And the end of that choice is separation from God: death. "There is a way which seemeth right unto a man, but the end thereof *are* the ways of death."⁸⁰⁷

The multiplicity of false and evil ways in contradistinction to the singularity of the way of truth and righteousness: The common aphorism: All roads lead to Rome does not apply to the heavenly Jerusalem. While the life history of every saint of God may vary in its specifics, this does not justify the assumption that there are many ways to God. Just as truth is known by immutability, it is also known by singularity. There are many counterfeits, but their multiplicity only argues the uniqueness of that which they strive to resemble; and the greater the worth of the genuine, the more the counterfeits. As God is one in essence and undivided, so the way that leads to Him is one in essence and unique. While the manifestation of that way in the individual life may very greatly (which should be of great comfort), what makes each way efficacious is the hand of God in it. God seeks those who would truly worship Him.⁸⁰⁸ Having chosen them, and purposed them for such an end,⁸⁰⁹ He calls and in calling draws them unto Himself by the mediation of His Son, Jesus.⁸¹⁰ So the many different personal experiences and various choices are not the Way, but simply those things that work together ⁸¹¹ to bring individuals to the unique Way, the person of Jesus. "I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me."⁸¹²

⁸⁰⁷ Proverbs 14:12, 16:25

⁸⁰⁸ John 4:23-24 But the hour cometh, and now is, when the true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth: for the Father seeketh such to worship him. God is a Spirit: and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth.

⁸⁰⁹ Romans 8:29 -30 For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren. Moreover whom he did predestinate, them he also called: and whom he called, them he also justified: and whom he justified, them he also glorified.

⁸¹⁰ John 6:37 All that the Father giveth me shall come to me; and him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out.

⁸¹¹ Romans 8:28 And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose.

⁸¹² John 14:6 -7 Jesus saith unto him, I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me. If ye had known me, ye should have known my Father also: and from henceforth ye know him, and have seen him.

י (NUN)

☞ The Word of God begets faith ☞

105 Thy word is a lamp unto my feet,
And a light unto my path

☞ Faith begets Determination ☞

106 I have sworn, and I will perform it,
That I will keep thy righteous judgments

☞ Determination begets Affliction and Affliction begets Humble Prayer ☞

107 I am afflicted very much:
Quicken me, O LORD, according unto thy word.

☞ Prayer begets Answers and Answers beget Gratitude and Devotion ☞

108 Accept, I beseech thee, the freewill offerings of my mouth,
O LORD, teach me thy judgments.

☞ Devotion begets Spiritual Danger and Danger begets Mindfulness of God ☞

109 My soul is continually in my hand:
Yet do I not forget thy law.

110 The wicked have laid a snare for me:
Yet I erred not from thy precepts.

☞ Mindfulness of God beget Deep Heart Joy and Obedience ☞

111 Thy testimonies have I taken as an heritage for ever:
For they are the rejoicing of my heart

112 I have inclined mine heart to perform thy statutes
Always, even unto the end.

☞

י – **Nun** means a sprout from a seed and represents the idea of continuing a new generation, offspring or heir. A person who understands the concept of nun would see an entire oak grove concealed in a single acorn. But what does one actually see in such generation? In any seed, one can behold the outworking of the mystery of life itself, life hidden in a seed that struggles to fulfill the ancient command of God to be fruitful and multiply.⁸¹³ And while we cannot explain how generation happens, we know that it

⁸¹³ Genesis 1:22 And God blessed them, saying, Be fruitful, and multiply, and fill the waters in the seas, and let fowl multiply in the earth. Genesis 1:28 And God blessed them, and God said unto them, Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth, and subdue it: and have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over every living thing that moveth upon the earth. Genesis 8:17 Bring forth with thee every living thing that is with thee, of all flesh, both of fowl, and of cattle, and of every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth; that they may breed abundantly in the earth, and be fruitful, and multiply upon the earth. Genesis 9:1 And God blessed Noah and his sons, and said unto them, Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth. Genesis 35:11 And God said unto him, I am God Almighty: be fruitful and multiply; a nation and a company of nations shall be of thee, and kings shall come out of thy loins; Genesis 41:52 And the name of the second called he Ephraim: For God hath caused me to be fruitful in the land of my affliction.

does happen all around us. Consider how a spark can generate an immense conflagration if the conditions are right. Great good (or evil) can come from the tiniest human seed. Going back to the humble acorn, our mind's eye can easily survey the various steps: from seed to sapling, from sapling to young tree, from young tree to mighty oak, from mighty oak to stump surrounded by saplings and so on. The process, though beginning with a single seed, does not end there. If undisturbed and if conditions are right the process continues relentlessly, repetitively for ages with no end in sight, the fulfillment of God's will for creation. The notion of a seed is the same concept that names entire tribes after the individual who begot them and who bequeathed them their inheritance, as the tribe of Judah, for example. The idea of generations sprouting from a single seed is of great Biblical interest. We encounter it in God's promise to faithful Abraham: "In thee and in thy seed shall all the families of the earth be blessed."⁸¹⁴ The Seed spoken of is yet another picture of our Lord Jesus, as the Apostle Paul makes clear in his letter to the Galatians "Now to Abraham and his seed were the promises made. He saith not, 'and to seeds, as of many; but as of one, and to thy seed, which is Christ.'" ⁸¹⁵ The real sense of this word, then, has to do with generation in the sense of a group of people who have been begotten by a single person, and the very process of begetting itself. In this octave, we have somewhat of that same process of life in the spirit. The beginning is just as humble, starting with a few seed-like words fitly spoken to a heart that is ready to receive them.⁸¹⁶ The psalmist speaks of the word of God as a lamp unto his feet and a light unto his path. If we pause and note that a lamp is not exactly the same as a light, the question arises what then is the relationship between them. Nun helps us understand that it is generation. The lamp generates the light by holding the wick in its store of oil and supporting the end of the wick as the wick moves oil by osmosis to the point of combustion. The wick, like the burning bush, burns but is not consumed. One might even say that the lamp begets the flame not as an event but as an ongoing process. The state of the relationship that subsists between the lamp and the light is one of begotten-ness. For the believer the

⁸¹⁴ Genesis 28:14. See also: Genesis 22:18 "And in thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed; because thou hast obeyed my voice." and Genesis 26:4 "And I will make thy seed to multiply as the stars of heaven, and will give unto thy seed all these countries; and in thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed..."

⁸¹⁵ Galatians 3:16

⁸¹⁶ Matthew 13:3 – 9, 18 – 23 And he spake many things unto them in parables, saying, Behold, a sower went forth to sow. And when he sowed, some seeds fell by the way side, and the fowls came and devoured them up. Some fell upon stony places, where they had not much earth: and forthwith they sprung up, because they had no deepness of earth. And when the sun was up, they were scorched; and because they had no root, they withered away. And some fell among thorns; and the thorns sprung up, and choked them. But other fell into good ground, and brought forth fruit, some a hundredfold, some sixty-fold, some thirty-fold. Who hath ears to hear, let him hear. ... Hear ye therefore the parable of the sower. When any one heareth the word of the kingdom, and understands it not, then cometh the wicked one, and catches away that which was sown in his heart. This is he which received seed by the way side. But he that received the seed into stony places, the same is he that heareth the word, and anon with joy receiveth it; Yet hath he not root in himself, but endureth for a while: for when tribulation or persecution arises because of the word, by and by he is offended. He also that received seed among the thorns is he that heareth the word; and the care of this world, and the deceitfulness of riches, choke the word, and he becometh unfruitful. But he that received seed into the good ground is he that heareth the word, and understands it; which also beareth fruit, and bringeth forth, some an hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty.

parabolic symbolism is easily guessed. The lighted lamp is a symbolic representation of the Holy Trinity: the Lamp as God the Father, the Oil as God the Holy Spirit, and the Burning Wick as Jesus, the only begotten Son of the Father, the promised Seed, and the light of the World.⁸¹⁷

As we look at the verses of this octave, then, it is the principle of generation, of one thing coming forth from another that helps us to understand the psalmist's words. In the first verse the word of God has begotten faith. The psalmist tells us, in effect that he is walking in the light of God's word because he believes it completely. He is walking by faith as we do, "for we walk by faith, not by sight."⁸¹⁸ In the next verse faith has begotten the determination, sealed by an oath, to "keep thy righteous judgments." But determination is not enough. Faith and determination beget affliction (107a).⁸¹⁹ The psalmist has learned by great affliction that "without me ye can do nothing"⁸²⁰ Affliction begets humility and prayer (107b), so the psalmist cries out to God to "quicken" him or give him that newness of life that is found alone through the instrumentality of that very word that brought forth faith. "As ye have therefore received Christ Jesus the Lord (*i.e. by faith*), so walk ye in him (*i.e. by faith*)"⁸²¹ Faith and determination have begotten experience and experience has begotten humility and prayer. And prayer begets answers. And answers beget gratitude and devotion (108) as expressed in the free-will offerings of his mouth: praise and thanksgiving which the psalmist asks God to receive, as well as a desire to learn yet more from God ("O LORD, teach me thy judgments"). But devotion begets danger from those who hate God and therefore hate us (109a, 110a).⁸²² Spiritual danger begets mindfulness of God's teaching (109b) and vigilance in the application of God's reasoning to our situations lest we miss-step from the path of humility (110b). Such trials serve the beneficial effect of purifying both the mind by enlightening it as to how the devices of the adversary of the spiritual life (Satan) work

⁸¹⁷ John 8:12 ¶ Then spake Jesus again unto them, saying, I am the light of the world: he that followeth me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life.

⁸¹⁸ 2 Corinthians 5:7

⁸¹⁹ It often comes as a surprise to young believers that faith brings troubles. But the linkage is clearly seen in Jesus' warning to His disciples. "Jesus answered them, Do ye now believe? Behold, the hour cometh, yea, is now come, that ye shall be scattered, every man to his own, and shall leave me alone: and yet I am not alone, because the Father is with me. These things I have spoken unto you, that in me ye might have peace. In the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world." (John 16:31-33)

⁸²⁰ John 15:5 I am the vine, ye are the branches: He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit: for without me ye can do nothing.

⁸²¹ Colossians 2:6

⁸²² Matthew 10:25 "It is enough for the disciple that he be as his master, and the servant as his lord. If they have called the master of the house Beelzebub, how much more shall they call them of his household?"

John 15:20 "Remember the word that I said unto you, The servant is not greater than his lord. If they have persecuted me, they will also persecute you; if they have kept my saying, they will keep yours also."

⁸²³ and exposing the weaknesses of our sinful nature so that it can be dealt with in confession and repentance.⁸²⁴

What are the final generations of this family tree of virtues? All this has led us to a deep joy in obtaining the eternal heritage of truth (“thy testimonies” – 111) and of a heart eternally committed to obedience to God’s statutes (112). It has all led us to Jesus Christ, Who is full of Grace and Truth. Peter tells the believers much the same thing.

“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, which according to his abundant mercy hath begotten us again unto a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fades not away, reserved in heaven for you, Who are kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation ready to be revealed in the last time. Wherein ye greatly rejoice, though now for a season, if need be, ye are in heaviness through manifold temptations: That the trial of your faith, being much more precious than of gold that perishes, though it be tried with fire, might be found unto praise and honor and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ.”⁸²⁵

Light and Darkness

¹⁰⁵ Thy word is a lamp unto my feet,
And a light unto my path



This verse is certainly one of the most well-known and oft quoted verses of psalm 119. It speaks of a lamp to guide the psalmist’s feet and a light unto his path. As noted, a lamp is not the same as a light. ♪ – NUN, which means a sprout from a seed and represents the idea of generation, helps us understand that the lamp generates the light by holding one end of the wick in its store of oil allowing the oil to move by osmosis to the point of combustion at the other end of the wick. The picture also evokes the remembrance of the burning bush that Moses saw, a bush which burned but was not consumed.⁸²⁶ The

⁸²³ 2 Corinthians 2:10 – 11 “To whom ye forgive any thing, I forgive also: for if I forgave any thing, to whom I forgave it, for your sakes forgave I it in the person of Christ; lest Satan should get an advantage of us: for we are not ignorant of his devices.

⁸²⁴ God and we know that we do go on sinning after our conversion and that Satan constantly seeks to get an advantage over us by means of his clever devices. But his opposition to the outworking of God’s purposes in the expansion of the spiritual life can not succeed because as the Apostle John reminds us “If we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanses us from all sin. If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.” 1 John 1:7 - 9

⁸²⁵ 1 Peter 1:3 -7 see also Ephesians 2:4 -7 But God, who is rich in mercy, for his great love wherewith he loved us, Even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ, (by grace ye are saved;) And hath raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus: That in the ages to come he might shew the exceeding riches of his grace in his kindness toward us through Christ Jesus.

⁸²⁶ Exodus 3:1 - 3 Now Moses kept the flock of Jethro his father in law, the priest of Midian: and he led the flock to the backside of the desert, and came to the mountain of God, even to Horeb. And the angel of the LORD appeared unto him in a flame of fire out of the

triune nature of a lamp (vessel, wick, and oil) also calls to mind the Holy Trinity: the vessel as God the Father, the Oil as God the Holy Spirit, and the burning wick as Jesus, the only begotten Son of the Father, the promised Seed, and the light of the World.⁸²⁷

But this verse also looks back to **ἡ** mem, which contrasted the way of truth and life in contradistinction to the way of evil (101) and falsehood (104). It builds on the image of the foot path introduced in verse 101.

101 I have refrained my feet from every evil way,
That I might keep thy word.

...

105 Thy word is a lamp unto my feet,
And a light unto my path

But the representation of the word as a lamp is new, in that it actually enables the psalmist to keep to the way of truth and life which he styles “my path”. Not only does the psalmist desire to “keep thy word” (101b), but that very word helps him to realize his desire (105). With the introduction of light into the metaphor, we must also consider what is implied by the absence of light: darkness. Darkness may simply refer to the human inability to foresee future events, decisions, and outcomes of choices. The future is ‘dark’ not in the sense of foreboding, but in the sense of being unknown and unknowable. Such a view, however, could easily give rise to viewing God’s word as a kind of fortune-telling schema like a Ouija board at a séance. While the omniscience of God presupposes His total awareness of future events;⁸²⁸ that does not mean that our relationship with Him should be bent on trying to pry that information from Him.⁸²⁹ Rather the basis of a harmonious relationship is one of ongoing dependency and trust, in much the same way that a person follows a path at night with a small oil lamp that illuminates only the next step. The word of God acts as an illumination of just the next step⁸³⁰ and thus supports every decision that must be made in turn.

Certainly, the future is dark, but the darkness implied here is also (and obviously) moral darkness. To go back to the metaphor, if a person tries to traverse a path at night without a lamp, he might stumble at unseen rocks, veer from the path and be lost, or even (in precipitous conditions) lose his footing and fall to his death. Even a “good” path that leads to “life” is not without its dangers. There must be a constant referring by

midst of a bush: and he looked, and, behold, the bush burned with fire, and the bush was not consumed. And Moses said, I will now turn aside, and see this great sight, why the bush is not burnt.

⁸²⁷ John 8:12 Then spake Jesus again unto them, saying, I am the light of the world: he that followeth me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life.

⁸²⁸ It is more accurate, perhaps to say that God is present in the eternal Now, that is from our perspective He is present in all time even as He is present in all space. So He is totally aware of all that happens at all time. Acts 15:18 “Known unto God are all his works from the beginning of the world.”

⁸²⁹ Even Jesus respects this reservation of knowledge by God the Father. Mt 24:35-36 “Heaven and earth shall pass away, but my words shall not pass away. But of that day and hour knoweth no man, no, not the angels of heaven, but my Father only.”

⁸³⁰ Unlike our present day flashlight which shines far down the path.

faith of each step, each decision that we make to the general directions provided in the word of God. The specifics of each step of faith can be addressed only by constant reference back to God in a prayer of dependency on His foreknowledge of every situation. Such a prayer flows naturally from the psalmist's (and hopefully our) desire to "keep thy word."

Another form of darkness arises when God, for whatever reason, does not provide specific directions. He is silent, and the lack of His direction is like darkness that settles upon the soul. While the psalmist speaks here of the general illuminating principle of the word of God, it is Isaiah that warns us of the danger when God is silent. "Who is among you that feareth the LORD, that obeyeth the voice of his servant, that walketh in darkness, and hath no light? Let him trust in the name of the LORD, and stay upon his God." To stay upon God means to sit still and wait. Such direction addresses not the spatial (volitional) directives of the Divine, but the temporal. The time for action is not yet. The choice in such cases is to stop or to go. Impetuous and self-directed busy-ness has great difficulty here. Self-will has a tendency to create its own illumination for every situation. And Isaiah warns of this error in the next verse. "Behold, all ye that kindle a fire, that compass yourselves about with sparks: walk in the light of your fire, and in the sparks that ye have kindled. This shall ye have of mine hand; ye shall lie down in sorrow."⁸³¹ Here, again, Jesus reveals this contrast in the dispute between family members and Himself where He tells them, "My time is not yet come: but your time is always ready."⁸³² The choices on the path are not always to turn left or right, but also whether to move or not. A wise pilgrim reads carefully, prays much, and listens closely.

Saved by Grace through Faith

¹⁰⁵ Thy word is a lamp unto my feet,
And a light unto my path
¹⁰⁶ I have sworn, and I will perform it,
That I will keep thy righteous judgments.
¹⁰⁷ I am afflicted very much:
Quicken me, O LORD, according unto thy word.



If the word of God is a lamp in the otherwise dark passage through life, this verse tells us that the psalmist has made a serious determination to walk in that light. The psalmist

⁸³¹ Isaiah 50:10 - 11

⁸³² John 7:3 - 10 "His brethren therefore said unto him, Depart hence, and go into Judaea, that thy disciples also may see the works that thou doest. For there is no man that doeth any thing in secret, and he himself seeketh to be known openly. If thou do these things, show thyself to the world. For neither did his brethren believe in him. Then Jesus said unto them, My time is not yet come: but your time is always ready. The world cannot hate you; but me it hateth, because I testify of it, that the works thereof are evil. Go ye up unto this feast: I go not up yet unto this feast; for my time is not yet full come. When he had said these words unto them, he abode still in Galilee. But when his brethren were gone up, then went he also up unto the feast, not openly, but as it were in secret.

could have said (simply) 'I have sworn to perform thy righteous judgments.' But he did not. He separates the testimony of his oath, from his performance of it. This construct brings in the notion of time. In making this statement as he does the psalmist places himself midway between his words: "I have sworn" occurring in the past and the fulfillment of his oath which he promises to fulfill in the future: "I will perform it". Both the oath and the performance involve the determination to "keep thy righteous judgments." The problem, of course, lies in the present moment in which (subliminally) he is promising to redeem his oath. Having chosen to present his statement as a hendiadys,⁸³³ we might read 106a as follows: "I have sworn, and (*now I am promising that in future*) I will perform it. But why does the psalmist choose this way of speaking? The verse draws our attention to the present moment. It is a moment of crisis. The circumstance in which the promise is made is described in verse 107. "I am afflicted very much: quicken me, O LORD, according unto thy word." The picture is that of the psalmist who is on the right way and who sees the next step because of the illumination of God's word, but there is much circumstantial opposition ("I am afflicted very much") that would tend to discourage him from keeping "thy righteous judgments." The psalmist is rehearsing his oath taken in the past, reinforcing it with a promise in the present moment of trial, but still crying out to God that He would quicken him (i.e. enable him to take the next step) according unto the very word that has shown him what that step is. Far from legal discussions about the advisability of taking oaths and keeping them⁸³⁴, of making promises and keeping them, of knowing God's judgment and keeping it; these verses present us with a specific instance, a microcosm, of the righteous soul's intercourse with God: illumination of the next step (a judgment) on God's part, and determination born of faith in God's word (articulated by an oath sealed by a promise) on the psalmist's part. But the psalmist knows that God's illumination and his determination are not enough. So, he cries out to God for the grace that will enable him to keep his oath, fulfill his promise, and take the next step. Far from these verses being a projection of an iron will moving forward against adversity, they present us the picture of a man who knows his weakness and unreliability and yet is willing to tell God of his determination. God has enlightened the psalmist through His word. This has begotten a most solemn determination or willingness to move in accordance with that word. This willingness immediately generates opposition and that opposition generates the psalmist's plea for grace to accomplish that next step that he has sworn and promised to take.

⁸³³ A hendiadys is a construct in which two words that separately describe a situation are joined by the connective 'and', when either word could have modified the other. For example, the sentence: 'it is nice and warm' is a hendiadys, that could have been said 'it is nicely warm.'

⁸³⁴ Numbers 30:2 "If a man vow a vow unto the LORD, or swear an oath to bind his soul with a bond; he shall not break his word, he shall do according to all that proceedeth out of his mouth."

The Apostle Paul experienced just such discouraging opposition. "For a great door and effectual is opened unto me, and there are many adversaries."⁸³⁵ While for the Paul the 'great door' referred to an opportunity to preach the Gospel, the great door for the psalmist and for us is the door of salvation. The way of truth and the way of life are in fact the way of salvation. But there "are many adversaries" and the spiritual life is a constant struggle against them. In fact, one of the hallmarks of an authentic spiritual pilgrimage is the ongoing struggle to stay on the right path. If truth describes the eternal actuality of the circumstances surrounding the decisions that we must each make, and life is the end of that series of decisions we must make, the grace of God is what enables us to take each step along the pathway of our life. It is the grace of God that 'saves' us from failure or from being deflected from the way of truth and the way of life. From the point of view of the psalmist (and from ours) God has begotten (a nun) both the willingness to walk in the right way (as evidenced by the oath and promise) and the ability to walk in the right way (as evidenced by His grace in response to the psalmist's plea "quicken me"). This concept of mutual participation in our salvation is described in the New Testament. "Wherefore, my beloved, as ye have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure."⁸³⁶ It was so with the psalmist. God was working in his life both to will and to do. Far from a salvation based on his or our iron-willed determination, salvation is a cooperative effort in which God respects our autonomy as the free creatures that He has made us (and still desires for us to be, though bound by the Sin nature). He illuminates by His word. We respond in faith and prayerful dependence on Him and He rewards our willing cooperation with the grace that enables us to work out that very salvation He has intended. It is still and always has been: "saved by grace through faith."⁸³⁷

Hallmarks

¹⁰⁷ I am afflicted very much:

Quicken me, O LORD, according unto thy word.

¹⁰⁸ Accept, I beseech thee, the freewill offerings of my mouth,
O LORD, and teach me thy judgments.



⁸³⁵ 1 Corinthians 16:9

⁸³⁶ Philippians 2:12 - 13

⁸³⁷ Ephesians 2:8 - 10 "For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast. For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them."

So far in this octave we have seen that the illumination of the word of God has begotten faith ⁸³⁸ (“Thy word is a lamp unto my feet and a light unto my path” - 105). Faith has begotten determination (“I have sworn, and I will perform it, that I will keep thy righteous judgments” - 106). Faith and determination have begotten opposition (“I am afflicted very much” - 107a). And faith, determination, and affliction have begotten prayer (“Quicken me, O LORD, according unto thy word” - 107b). From verse 108, we may infer that the prayer of faith has begotten a favorable answer which has placed the psalmist in a new position, presumably having taken the next desired step, so that the prayer for quickening continues on to thanksgiving and a plea for further illumination (“Accept, I beseech thee, the freewill offerings of my mouth, O LORD, and teach me thy judgments” - 108).

This progression of ‘begetting’ argues an ongoing spiritual process. We see this in the continuation of verse 108 from verse 102. “I have not departed from thy judgments: for thou hast taught me. ... Accept, I beseech thee, the freewill offerings of my mouth, O LORD, and teach me thy judgments.” This coupling is unique to these two verses. All the other seven “teach me” petitions center mainly on “thy statutes.”⁸³⁹ There is also a progression nascent in the concept of a judgment itself. While a commandment has a constancy, judgments are situation specific. And judgment really describes the progression along the pilgrim’s pathway. Step follows step and judgment follows judgment. Commandments may be constant, but the only constancy for spiritual direction is the constant need for moment by moment spiritual direction amid ever changing circumstances. It is this divine direction with its constant cycle of hearing the word of God, believing the word of God, resolving to follow each successive judgment, and constant prayer for grace followed by gratitude for each provision and continued petition that marks a vital relationship with God. As the psalmist said at the start, the blessed are those who, undefiled in the way, walk in the law of the LORD, keep his testimonies, and seek him with the whole heart. These verses also provided us with at least four additional hallmarks to those first verses of longing.

⁸³⁸ This is a general and a central principle of the spiritual life. Paul tells us: “So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.” (Romans 10:17). It the role of presenting the word of God lies at the root of the necessity of presenting the Gospel to the sinner as well as the central role of the Bible as the premier devotional text for believers. Jesus teaches the centrality of this divinely principle, “It is the spirit that quickeneth; the flesh profiteth nothing: the words that I speak unto you, they are spirit, and they are life. But there are some of you that believe not.” (John 6:63-64a)

⁸³⁹ Ps 119:12 Blessed art thou, O LORD: teach me thy statutes. 26 I have declared my ways, and thou heardest me: teach me thy statutes. 33 Teach me, O LORD, the way of thy statutes; and I shall keep it unto the end. 64 The earth, O LORD, is full of thy mercy: teach me thy statutes. 66 Teach me good judgment and knowledge: for I have believed thy commandments. 68 Thou art good, and doest good; teach me thy statutes. 124 Deal with thy servant according unto thy mercy, and teach me thy statutes. 135 Make thy face to shine upon thy servant; and teach me thy statutes.

1. **Constant Struggle:** The spiritual life is a constant struggle against opposition both within and without. We are warned that “we must through much tribulation enter into the kingdom of God”⁸⁴⁰
2. **The Need for Prayer:** There is a constant understanding of our innate inability to take the steps that God tells us are necessary to take and therefore our constant need for the grace of God. “I know that in me (that is, in my flesh,) dwelleth no good thing: for to will is present with me; but how to perform that which is good I find not.”⁸⁴¹
3. **Obedience:** Obedience is still the *sine qua non* of the spiritual life. But this is not obedience to the law. Rather it is an obedience to the faith as Paul tells us: “Paul, a servant of Jesus Christ, called to be an apostle, ... by whom we have received grace and apostleship, for obedience to the faith among all nations.” Obedience to the faith is possible only by means of the grace of God given in response to that faith. But grace is a gift and there is always the danger of receiving it to no useful end. So we are also warned, “receive not the grace of God in vain.”⁸⁴²
4. **Gratitude:** The spiritual life is one of constant prayer with thanksgiving. It reflects our utter need of God’s spiritual direction, His enabling grace, and His many answers to prayer. It fulfills Paul’s admonition in the New Testament. “Be careful for nothing; but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God, and the peace of God, which passes all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.”⁸⁴³ In these verses, all four of these hallmarks of a vital relationship with God are easily observed.

The Risk of Worship

¹⁰⁹ My soul is continually in my hand:

Yet do I not forget thy law.

¹¹⁰ The wicked have laid a snare for me:

Yet I erred not from thy precepts.



These two matching verses look back to the psalmist’s plaint: “I am afflicted very much.”⁸⁴⁴ They present the continual risk the psalmist suffers for not forgetting God’s governance or erring from its principles. The psalmist’s ongoing fidelity continually provokes the wicked to plot his harm. From the psalmist’s point of view, “my soul is

⁸⁴⁰ Note the Apostle’s confirmation of early faith: “And when they had preached the gospel to that city, and had taught many, they returned again to Lystra, and to Iconium, and Antioch, confirming the souls of the disciples, and exhorting them to continue in the faith, and that we must through much tribulation enter into the kingdom of God.” (Acts 14:21-22)

⁸⁴¹ Romans 7:18

⁸⁴² 2 Corinthians 6:1 We then, as workers together with him, beseech you also that ye receive not the grace of God in vain.

⁸⁴³ Philippians 4:6 - 7

⁸⁴⁴ Psalm 119:107 I am afflicted very much: quicken me, O LORD, according unto thy word.

continually in my hand.” The word for hand is כף (pronounced kaf) - the hollow of the hand or the palm. The picture suggests that in his faithfulness to God, the psalmist is carrying around his very soul (נפש – nephesh), his breath, his life exposed in the palm of his hand and therefore vulnerable to theft by the wicked.

The wicked, for their part, have laid a snare or spread a net, much in the same way that a fowler spreads a fine net to catch small birds in flight. The image of the use of malevolent inventions to cause spiritual or physical harm continues from the suggestion of ropes used to bind the victim of robbery,⁸⁴⁵ to the pit dug by the wicked.⁸⁴⁶ There seems to be no way out for the psalmist. The net is spread in the way that the precepts of God would direct him. There is terrible sense of not only of ongoing risk involved in following the way of life, but the seeming inevitability of being snared and destroyed by the malevolence of the wicked.

But this apparent inevitability of danger explains why the psalmist raises these verses. Without the intervention of God, the psalmist will lose in this contest between himself and the wicked. Not only is he vulnerable (my soul is continually in my hand) but he is in a place of unavoidable danger (the wicked have laid a snare for me). He is telling God that he is powerless to prevent the devices of the wicked from doing their harm. He does this as a kind of veiled plea that once again God would rescue him.

But this situation raises more elemental question. Why is it necessary to go through all these traumatic experiences (ropes, pits, and snares) with the wicked? Is the struggle of the spiritual life nothing more than a continual game of taking foolish risks; of playing ‘catch me if you can’ with the wicked; of baiting the malevolence of evil? The answer is clearly no. That there are risks associated with following God, even life-threatening risks, is manifest. But those risks are not undertaken with regard to the wicked, they are undertaken in spite of them. The psalmist knows that while his soul is continually in the open palm of his hand, God’s law is continually in his heart. Because he does not err from the way of God’s precepts, God will not suffer him to be lost. The psalmist is taking these risks because he supremely values his developing and ongoing relationship with God. The psalmist knows that the relationship gained is worth far more than the risk, because he knows that God is supremely worthy in Himself. By placing his soul in his hand, in going forward despite the snare that he wicked have laid across his path, the psalmist tells us of the price that he is willing to pay in order to continue in fellowship with God.

In an age when we associate worship of God with attendance at church services and listening to sermons, the psalmist challenges us to consider at what price we offer our worship? What risks are we really willing to take in following after God? What price are

⁸⁴⁵ Psalm 119:61 The bands of (i.e. the ropes used by) the wicked have robbed me: but I have not forgotten thy law.

⁸⁴⁶ Psalm 119:85 The proud have digged pits for me, which are not after thy law.

we willing to pay for our professed devotion to God? This question is supremely important to us, because our relationship with God is based on a mutual assessment of worth by both parties. If we set the value of that relationship at less than all else, even our life, we are in danger of being rejected by the very God whom we desire to follow. Jesus warns His followers of this when he sets the bar far higher than we might customarily assume it to be. "He that loveth father or mother more than me is not worthy of me: and he that loveth son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me. And he that taketh not his cross, and followeth after me, is not worthy of me. He that findeth his life shall lose it: and he that loseth his life for my sake shall find it."⁸⁴⁷ The psalmist is under no delusions about the reality of the cost of fellowship with God. He is like the man who found a treasure hid in a field or the merchantmen who found a pearl of great price both of whom were willing to sell all to obtain it.⁸⁴⁸

But there is more. It is only those who are willing to take such a risk on God's faithfulness, those who are willing to trust Him with their very lives, and by that trust affirm God's supreme worthiness, who will ever see the hand of God in deliverance and be able to praise Him for His fidelity to them.

Blessed be the LORD,
Who hath not given us as a prey to their teeth.
Our soul is escaped as a bird out of the snare of the fowlers:
The snare is broken, and we are escaped.
Our help is in the name of the LORD,
Who made heaven and earth.⁸⁴⁹

A Wise Choice

¹¹¹ Thy testimonies have I taken as an heritage for ever:
For they are the rejoicing of my heart.



This verse marks a shift in focus away from the peril of following God in the face of wicked people (described in the last two verses) to a more bucolic and joyous vision of the spiritual life. To understand this shift, we must understand what the psalmist's action of 'taking God's testimonies as his heritage forever' really means.

When Israel entered the land promised to Abraham and his progeny, the land was to be divided among the tribes and among individuals in the tribes. This division marked a

⁸⁴⁷ Matthew 10:37 - 39

⁸⁴⁸ Matthew 13:44 - 46 Again, the kingdom of heaven is like unto treasure hid in a field; the which when a man hath found, he hideth, and for joy thereof goeth and selleth all that he hath, and buyeth that field. Again, the kingdom of heaven is like unto a merchant man, seeking goodly pearls: Who, when he had found one pearl of great price, went and sold all that he had, and bought it.

⁸⁴⁹ Psalm 124: 6 - 8

shift from the life of nomadic herding of the patriarchs and the previous four decades of wandering, to a more settled life of small agriculture in the Promised Land. Described as a land “flowing with milk and honey”⁸⁵⁰, the appellation suggests a life of dairy farming and apiculture. Central to such a life was the possession of a piece of land that ideally would be held by the family members in perpetuity. It was to be passed from generation to generation (נָחַל nun) as an inheritance. But the word heritage⁸⁵¹ carries other connotations as well. It refers not just specifically to property passed from one generation to another but also to the place one occupies in the familial as well as the national societal structure. One’s heritage establishes one’s place relationally as well geographically. It also suggests the wealth of the individual. A goodly heritage could be enlarged by generations of wise business dealings so that the individual who receives that enlarged heritage could not only live off the products of animal and agricultural husbandry, but also have a very significant position socially. In short, a good heritage not only gave one life support, but societal status as well. It even came to identify the person in relation to others. Heritage conferred land and wealth but suggested status and identity as well.

If we reflect for a moment on what the wicked sought to deprive the psalmist of in laying their snare (110), it is precisely these: life, status, and identity. So, while this verse shifts focus from the wicked and their machinations to rejoicing in the testimonies of the LORD, it does not lose sight of the danger already described. Rather, it answers that threat in a very effective way. As they lay a snare for his soul, he joyfully clings to the testimonies of the LORD as a defense against their intended depredations. They cannot, for all their malevolence, deprive him of his heritage because it is his forever. When the psalmist says “Thy testimonies have I taken as an heritage forever,” he is telling his enemies as well as God that he will never let go of those testimonial treasures. The causative nature of that decision to hang on forever is significant. He holds fast because “Thy testimonies ... are the rejoicing of my heart.” Such an affective state would clearly be jarring to those who wished him ill. We may infer that their intent was to induce fear. But instead he erupts into a burst of joyous praise. His joy is like that of the young man who has finally come into full possession of his abundant patrimony.

Clearly, the psalmist’s use of the word “נָחַל nachal” (heritage) is metaphorical. The testimonies of the LORD are not geography. So why does he rejoice as if they were? He rejoices because the testimonies of the LORD confer upon him spiritually what land and agrarian wealth confer upon the individual Israelite physically. They confer the

⁸⁵⁰ Of the twenty references, Exodus 3:17 is typical: “And I have said, I will bring you up out of the affliction of Egypt unto the land of the Canaanites, and the Hittites, and the Amorites, and the Perizzites, and the Hivites, and the Jebusites, unto a land flowing with milk and honey.”

⁸⁵¹ נָחַל nachal, (pronounced naw-khal') is a primitive root meaning literally to inherit and figuratively it describes a mode of descent. It has the general connotation to occupy as well as causatively to bequeath, distribute or divide among heirs.

assurance of his continued life in God. They secure his most valued identity as the Servant of God. And the relationship vouchsafed is not that with family or society, but with God, Himself. In choosing to hold fast the testimonies of God as his heritage forever; his life in God, his place in eternity, and his identity as God's servant can never be forfeit. His enemies may take physical things from him (as many have done to believers at other times⁸⁵²) but they cannot take these from him.

What does all this mean for us? In his joyous testimony, the psalmist is telling us something as well as God and his enemies. In Israel's history, many lost their societal heritage through unwise business dealings or adverse events like invasions of foreign powers.⁸⁵³ There must have been many poor people that lamented the better material position of the wealthy, then as now. But the psalmist would direct our eyes away from the shadows of a prosperous material heritage to the reality of a rich spiritual heritage. And the marvel of that far more precious heritage is that anyone may obtain it. God's testimonies are given to as many as are willing to search them out and hold them fast. Doubtless this truth is implicit in our Lord Jesus' admonition, "Therefore take no thought, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or, 'What shall we drink?' or, 'Wherewithal shall we be clothed?' For after all these things do the Gentiles seek, but for your heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of all these things. But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you."⁸⁵⁴ It is not chance that assigns such a heritage, but a real possibility which exists for each of us to lay hold of it and to be able to say with the psalmist, "The lines are fallen unto me in pleasant places; yea, I have a goodly heritage."⁸⁵⁵ The choice is ours to make.

⁸⁵² Hebrews 11:36 - 40 And others had trial of cruel mockings and scourgings, yea, moreover of bonds and imprisonment: They were stoned, they were sawn asunder, were tempted, were slain with the sword: they wandered about in sheepskins and goatskins; being destitute, afflicted, tormented; (Of whom the world was not worthy:) they wandered in deserts, and in mountains, and in dens and caves of the earth. And these all, having obtained a good report through faith, received not the promise: God having provided some better thing for us, that they without us should not be made perfect.

⁸⁵³ Such losses were never God's intent for His people. But when they sinned through idolatry particularly, their national benefits were often forfeit in an attempt to persuade them to repent.

"Hear, O heavens, and give ear, O earth: for the LORD hath spoken, I have nourished and brought up children, and they have rebelled against me. The ox knoweth his owner, and the ass his master's crib: but Israel doth not know, my people doth not consider. Ah sinful nation, a people laden with iniquity, a seed of evildoers, children that are corrupters: they have forsaken the LORD, they have provoked the Holy One of Israel unto anger, they are gone away backward. Why should ye be stricken any more? Ye will revolt more and more: the whole head is sick, and the whole heart faint. From the sole of the foot even unto the head there is no soundness in it; but wounds, and bruises, and putrefying sores: they have not been closed, neither bound up, neither mollified with ointment. Your country is desolate; your cities are burned with fire: your land, strangers devour it in your presence, and it is desolate, as overthrown by strangers. And the daughter of Zion is left as a cottage in a vineyard, as a lodge in a garden of cucumbers, as a besieged city." - Isaiah 1:2 - 8

The sad fact that the history of Israel should tell us is that the poverty of our spiritual lives is of far greater importance to a loving God than the prosperity of our materially centered existence. And if God is so concerned, then we do well to observe it as well.

⁸⁵⁴ Matthew 6:31 -33

⁸⁵⁵ Psalm 16:6

The Force of the Spiritual Life

³⁶ Incline my heart unto thy testimonies,
And not to covetousness.

...

¹¹¹ Thy testimonies have I taken as an heritage forever:
For they are the rejoicing of my heart.

¹¹² I have inclined mine heart to perform thy statutes always,
Even unto the end.



The two last verses of this octave answer not only to the wicked that meant ill to the psalmist, but also describe his relationship with God as an affair of the heart. God's testimonies are the rejoicing of his heart (111), but His statutes are also the guide to his will (112). The psalmist's heart, which clings with joy to God's word as an heir clings to a great and everlasting heritage, is also filled with determination to take actions according to God's word as it applies to all of life's situations. The two verses are clearly connected through the mention of the heart. How then does verse 112 follow from verse 111? If we go back to the metaphor of a material heritage for a moment, it is not difficult to realize that a responsible young person, coming into a great and valuable heritage that involved land and herds that had been enlarged over many preceding generations would certainly want to follow suit. The responsible inheritor of large and valuable holdings would see that heritage as a stewardship to be managed and further enlarged for his children and grandchildren and not as a possession to be squandered on selfish pleasure as the prodigal son did. Not only would the land have to be managed but the nurture of its future land lords assured as well so that they too would not squander the labor of generations before them. So, the new heir, upon entering into possession of his heritage begins to lay plans for the management and enlargement of that heritage. This shift from joy to determination, from anticipation to possession, from servant ⁸⁵⁶ to steward is the same shift that underlies these two verses.

At first glance, then, verse 111 might be seen as the cause of verse 112; that the joy of the psalmist's heart has begotten the inclination of his heart, his determination. But the psalmist's prayer in verse 36 suggests otherwise. Both his joy and his determination are

⁸⁵⁶ The apostle Paul refers to this common cultural practice of parental training of the heir presumptive in his letter to the Galatians to explain how God the Father has kept humanity in their spiritual minority in bondage under "the elements of the world" or "the law" as a preparation for the liberation from that servitude by the Gospel of His Son, Jesus Christ. Paul Tells the Galatians: "Now I say, that the heir, as long as he is a child, differs nothing from a servant, though he be lord of all; but is under tutors and governors until the time appointed of the father. Even so we, when we were children, were in bondage under the elements of the world: But when the fullness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law, to redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons. And because ye are sons, God hath sent forth the Spirit of his Son into your hearts, crying, Abba, Father. Wherefore thou art no more a servant, but a son; and if a son, then an heir of God through Christ." Galatians 4:1-7

the result of answered prayer. In verse 36, the psalmist pleaded with God to incline his heart to the very testimonies that now he takes as his heritage forever. And with the receipt of that heritage comes the desire of the heir to make good in his stewardship. As he has prayed that God would incline his heart (36), so now he inclines his heart (112). This cycle of divine-human cooperation lies at the very core of the scriptures. It is this role of human activity in response to divine articulation which differentiates true and effectual faith from a purely cerebral assent to truth. The effectual prayer of faith inevitably takes action in concert with God's enabling answer. James remonstrates: "Yea, a man may say, 'Thou hast faith, and I have works': shew me thy faith without thy works, and I will shew thee my faith by my works. Thou believest that there is one God; thou doest well: the devils also believe, and tremble. But wilt thou know, O vain man, that faith without works is dead?"⁸⁵⁷ The admonition that can be derived from this passage and the whole of those scriptures that deal with faith is articulated by the apostle Paul in his letter to the assembly at Philippi: "Wherefore, my beloved, as ye have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure."⁸⁵⁸

There still remains the question of how these last verses relate to and complete this whole octave of ׀ (nun – generation or begetting). In this octave we have seen the word of God begets faith (105). That faith begets determination (106). Such determination to follow God begets hostility of the wicked and affliction (107, 110). But affliction begets prayers (107) whose answers beget gratitude and devotion (108). Of course, the spiritual animosity does not subside but continues in verses (109 and 110). But this continued spiritual danger only confirms the psalmist's mindfulness of God, his joy in His testimonies and his determination to perform His statutes. But, as we have seen, these last verses are really an answer to the heartfelt prayer in verse 36. Verse 36 is in the octave ׀ He - to reveal or to show. The prayer in verse 36 that God would incline the psalmist's heart to God, Himself is really the response of the psalmist to God's revelation of His presence, suggested by ׀ (which can be taken to mean "Here am I"⁸⁵⁹).

⁸⁵⁷ James 2:18-20

⁸⁵⁸ Philippians 2:12 - 13

⁸⁵⁹ We hear an echo of the Messiah's willingness to Personally manifest God's presence in Isaiah's willingness to serve as God's messenger. "Also I heard the voice of the Lord, saying, Whom shall I send, and who will go for us? Then said I, Here am I; send me." - Isaiah 6:8

This note of Messianic willingness surfaces again in the Letter to the Hebrews. "Wherefore when he cometh into the world, he saith, Sacrifice and offering thou wouldest not, but a body hast thou prepared me: In burnt offerings and sacrifices for sin thou hast had no pleasure.

Then said I, Lo, I come (in the volume of the book it is written of me,) to do thy will, O God. Above when he said, Sacrifice and offering and burnt offerings and offering for sin thou wouldest not, neither hadst pleasure therein; which are offered by the law; Then said he, Lo, I come to do thy will, O God. He taketh away the first, that he may establish the second. By the which will we are sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all."

- Hebrews 10:5 - 10

It is really this prayer and its answer that has initiated this generative cycle of spiritual cause and effect found in a nun. In short, it is the presence of God that lies at the root of the unfolding of the entire spiritual life as one step generates another. Central to that unfolding is the individual's response to God's revelation of Himself: faith as expressed in prayer.

ו (SAMECH)

☞ The Psalmist's Dispositions ☞

- 113 I hate vain thoughts:
But thy law do I love.
- 114 Thou art my hiding place and my shield:
I hope in thy word.
- 115 Depart from me, ye evildoers:
For I will keep the commandments of my God

☞ The Psalmist's Prayer ☞

- 116 Uphold me according unto thy word,
That I may live: and let me not be ashamed of my hope.
- 117 Hold thou me up, and I shall be safe:
And I will have respect unto thy statutes continually.

☞ God's Actions ☞

- 118 Thou hast trodden down all them that err from thy statutes:
For their deceit is falsehood.
- 119 Thou puttest away all the wicked of the earth like dross:
Therefore I love thy testimonies.

☞ The Psalmist's Response to God's Actions ☞

- 120 My flesh trembleth for fear of thee;
And I am afraid of thy judgments.

☞

ו - Samech means to support, to uphold, or to lean upon. When we think of supports; mechanical props like tomato stakes or material properties (“props”) that support an actor’s role could be included. Old people come to depend on canes and walkers to support their failing mobility. But support goes far deeper than we might realize. Healthy relationships involve support. This octave includes the psalmist’s prayer in the middle verses (116, 117). “Uphold me ... Hold⁸⁶⁰ thou me up” he pleads. It is the LORD that he pleads will be His support. While we can learn much about the importance of our relationship with God from this octave, in a wider sense we can also learn much about of our relationships in general. As Christians, our relationship with God through His Son, Jesus Christ, is of central importance to each of us. But our relationship with our neighbor, made in the image of God, is equally important. The Apostle John warns

⁸⁶⁰ The psalmist uses two similar words in his prayer, both beginning with ו – samach. The first word “uphold” (116) is סמך *camak*, (pronounced saw-mak') a primitive root which means both literally and figuratively to prop. Reflexively it means to lean upon or take hold of, to be borne up by. The second word “hold” (117) is סעד *ca'ad*, (pronounced saw-ad') a primitive root meaning to figuratively support or comfort, to establish, or refresh. It has the same sense that we would attach to holding a loved one in our arms to comfort them and provide emotional support.

us: "If a man say, I love God, and hates his brother, he is a liar: for he that loveth not his brother whom he hath seen, how can he love God whom he hath not seen? And this commandment we have from him, that he who loveth God love his brother also."⁸⁶¹

If we consider the relationship of the psalmist with God to be normative, then by reflection, we may be able to gain some understanding of a healthy relationship and (conversely) how to identify and deal with an unhealthy or toxic relationship with people around us. This octave intimates that any healthy relationship is supportive. It may be supportive physically, emotionally, intellectually, or spiritually or in some combination, but healthy relationships are supportive. In marriage, for example, one or both partners are involved in providing mutual economic support. Certainly, in a healthy marriage each partner provides the other emotional support, perhaps by giving one another a hug when needed but often by listening sympathetically and working together to solve problems they face.

For the psalmist, his relationship centers on God's words: thy law, thy word, thy statutes, thy testimonies, thy judgments. This should not surprise us, because communication is the life blood of any relationship. Our affective response to the communication nascent in any relationship tells us of its beneficence or toxicity. "Thy law do I love ... I hope in thy word ... I love thy testimonies ... I am afraid of thy judgments (i.e. I stand in awe of them and you)" Nor is the psalmist's response merely affective. His desire and will are involved. "I will keep the commandments of my God ... I will have respect unto thy statutes continually." The communications involved in loving and supportive relationships should draw forth faith, hope, and above all love. They should open before us avenues of activity which both challenge and motivate us to realize our full potential as people.

But just as we cannot be in two places at the same time, so we cannot go down two divergent paths of life at the same time either.⁸⁶² Healthy relationships, therefore, teach us much about unhealthy relationships. Because he can say "I love thy law", the psalmist can also say "I hate vain thoughts." Because he can say "I will keep the commandments of my God," the psalmist can also say, "Depart from me, ye evildoers." Because the psalmist has "respect unto thy statutes continually," he knows that God has, "trodden down all them that err from thy statutes." The psalmist knows that the communication of those that "err from thy statutes" (i.e. those that sustain toxic relationships with others) is falsehood uttered with the intent to deceive. He says of them that err from thy statutes, "their deceit is falsehood." So, what is the psalmist to do

⁸⁶¹ 1 John 4:20 - 21

⁸⁶² Amos 3:3 "Can two walk together, except they be agreed?" 2 Corinthians 6:16 "...what agreement hath the temple of God with idols? For ye are the temple of the living God; as God hath said, I will dwell in them, and walk in them; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people." Matthew 6:24 "No man can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon."

with these unsupportive, falsehood-ridden, toxic relationships? He must make a choice between relating to God or to them because he knows he cannot be a friend of God and of the world.⁸⁶³ That is why he cries, “Depart from me, ye evildoers: For I will keep the commandments of my God.” And God supports the psalmist’s decision: “Thou putttest away all the wicked of the earth like dross.” What the psalmist does is good advice for us as well.

There is also the sense of identification in support. If, for example, I was to search for a symbol of failing old age, the aforementioned walker standing by itself might be appropriate because, through long visual association, it has come to be identified with elderly people. It is interesting that of the 47 times **סמך** samak is used in the Old Testament, it is used 23 times of the laying on of hands, 18 times with regard to sacrificial animals and 5 times with regard to people. The other 24 times it is used variously to bear up, to sustain, to stay, to trust, to lean upon. It is the sense of being sustained or borne up that is prevalent in the psalms. But the point with **ס** – samach is that, whether in sacrifice or in other venues of support, there is always an element of identification in relating to something or someone. By laying on hands, the sacrificial animal was identified with the sinner(s). By laying on hands, people were identified with something or someone. We may better understand this if we consider the moment of *rapprochement* of the prodigal with his long-suffering father. The prodigal had left with his inheritance and used it entirely for the economic support of his pursuit of various pleasures. Having wasted all his substance, he endeavored to support himself by hiring himself out as a farm hand on a pig farm. But he failed and decided to seek work as a hired hand on his father’s farm. Humbled and returning to his father looking for work, the repentant prodigal found, instead, a loving embrace. His father held him in his arms. He also reaffirmed that the relationship which had been ruptured was now restored. (“For this my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found”⁸⁶⁴). The son had returned with no viable means of support. Instead of the business relationship as a hired hand that the prodigal planned on and expected, he found that his familial relationship was restored and his father was willing (and happy) to resume his role as economic as well as emotional support. The older brother, who knew little of the father’s love, was grieved because he felt such support was not justified after the prodigal’s actions compared to his own. But the father’s identification with his son could not be effaced. The father’s response to the prodigal is exactly what the psalmist is asking of God: to be supported (116) and to be embraced or comforted (117).

There is a lovely picture of our Lord Jesus in all this, not only because He bears the burden of our guilt and shame (as **ו** – vau, the nail) but on the cross, but also because He

⁸⁶³ James 4:4 “Ye adulterers and adulteresses, know ye not that the friendship of the world is enmity with God? Whosoever therefore will be a friend of the world is the enemy of God.”

⁸⁶⁴ Luke 15:24

is identified with us as sinners (ס – samech, the support).⁸⁶⁵ In the laying on of hands on the heads of sacrificial animals (סמך samak) we see foreshadowed our identification with Him as our perfect sacrifice. What is it then that prompts this joining of two separate identities into one new identity? It is love, the love of God unbounded and fathomless that makes one.⁸⁶⁶

When we realize the significance of the central prayer, then the rest of this octave is easier to understand. In 113-115 we have the psalmist's actions or dispositions. In 116-117 we have the Psalmist's prayer. In 118-119 we have God's actions, and in 120 we have the psalmist's response to God's actions. There is a certain amount of parallelism between the psalmist's actions or dispositions and God's actions. In 115a, the psalmist bids evildoers to depart from him; while in 119, God puts away "all the wicked of the earth like dross." In 113a the psalmist tells us, "I hate vain thoughts." Adam Clarke comments on this verse "- I have hated סעפים - seaphim, "tumultuous, violent men." I abominate all mobs and insurrections, and troublers of the public peace. In 118a, God has "trodden down all them that err from thy statutes." The parallelism of these verses suggests that here, at least, he is starting to think and act as God does in His perfections. But there is an element of choice that is unique to the psalmist hovering just below his expulsion of the evildoers, and the hint is in 118b, the testimony of God that "their deceit is falsehood." We might ask what deceit? The answer is their bogus offer to be a loving, caring support for the psalmist in lieu of God. But he knows full well that "... the friendship of the world is enmity with God. Whosoever therefore will be a friend of the world is the enemy of God."⁸⁶⁷ The psalmist has a choice to make and he does so. He casts them out and God will tread them underfoot. Why are the evildoers expelled? They are cast out, because their deceitful promise is utterly false. He tells us in no uncertain terms: thy law do I love - (113b), I hope in thy word - (114b), I will keep the commandments of my God - (115b). Furthermore, because God puts away all the wicked of the earth like dross, the psalmist further rejoices in God's testimonies and His justice. The psalmist longs for a truly just governance and that perfection of justice is the hallmark of divine governance. Who among us would not love the testimonies of such governance?

⁸⁶⁵ The apostle Paul makes mention of both aspects in different places in his letters, In 1 Corinthians 15:3, he writes "For I delivered unto you first of all that which I also received, how that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures...". But in Romans 5:8, he tells us, "But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us." The former speaks of Jesus bearing the burden of our guilty sins, while the latter speaks of his identification with us on the cross. He died because He stood in our place. God saw us sinners in Him on the cross.

⁸⁶⁶ Nowhere is this love borne one-ness described more fully than in that part of our Lord's high priestly prayer found in John 17:20 – 23 "Neither pray I for these alone, but for them also which shall believe on me through their word; That they all may be one; as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us: that the world may believe that thou hast sent me. And the glory which thou gavest me I have given them; that they may be one, even as we are one: I in them, and thou in me, that they may be made perfect in one; and that the world may know that thou hast sent me, and hast loved them, as thou hast loved me."

⁸⁶⁷ James 4:4

But there is ambivalence in this psalm that is instructive. The octave begins, “thy law do I love” and it ends, “I am afraid of thy judgments.” These statements are not a contradiction. Rather they describe an awe filled love which testifies that we should love the Lord our God with all our heart, soul, and strength ⁸⁶⁸ but that the fear of the Lord is still the beginning of wisdom.⁸⁶⁹ Where either is lacking, then we are justified in suspecting that the other is somehow deficient.

Finally, we should consider the nature of the support which the psalmist’s relationship with God provides. While the support that a healthy relationship provides may focus on various life needs (physical, emotional, intellectual, or spiritual), the psalmist equates the preservation of his relationship with God with the safe preservation of his own life. “Thou art my hiding place and my shield. I hope in thy word. ... Uphold me according unto thy word, that I may live: and let me not be ashamed of my hope. Hold thou me up, and I shall be safe.” The psalmist is telling us that to be properly related to God is to live. Jesus says as much when explains in His great prayer, “... this is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent.”⁸⁷⁰ What was true for the psalmist is equally true for us today. The only difference is that we understand that the word of God, which the psalmist believed in, hoped upon, and loved, is for us the foreshadowing of the eternal Word of God, Jesus Christ, Who has come in their fulfillment.⁸⁷¹

Heart Dynamics

¹¹³ I hate vain thoughts:

But thy law do I love.



This verse marks the beginning of the octave ם (samech) which means to support or uphold. In the last octave we saw that God is the beginning of and driving force behind the spiritual life. “...He which hath begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ” ⁸⁷² Here we will see that as God has begun each believer’s spiritual

⁸⁶⁸ Luke 10:27 And he answering said, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy strength, and with all thy mind; and thy neighbor as thyself.

⁸⁶⁹ Psalm 111:10 The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom: a good understanding have all they that do his commandments: his praise endureth for ever.

⁸⁷⁰ John 17:1 - 3 “These words spake Jesus, and lifted up his eyes to heaven, and said, ‘Father, the hour is come; glorify thy Son, that thy Son also may glorify thee: as thou hast given him power over all flesh, that he should give eternal life to as many as thou hast given him. And this is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent.’ ”

⁸⁷¹ Hebrews 1:1-2a “God, who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets, hath in these last days spoken unto us by *his* Son,...”

John 1:1-2, 14 “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. The same was in the beginning with God.... And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth.”

⁸⁷² Philippians 1:6 “Being confident of this very thing, that he which hath begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ”

life, so He also supports that life. We also noted that relationship with God is a matter of the heart. God's testimonies are the rejoicing of the psalmist's heart (111) and His statutes are those to which his heart continually inclines (112). The psalmist begins this octave with a black and white statement about the cast of his heart: a statement of love and hate. He says, "I hate vain thoughts, but thy law do I love." The mention of love carries forward the thought of joy in 111. The psalmist's joy in God's testimonies rests on the foundation of his love for God's law. It is this love which binds his heart to God as his support. Law suggests governance. Today, we are wont to describe governance as "the rule of law." But this octave suggests that the role of any governance (especially divine) is the support of the growth of the governed.⁸⁷³ In that sense government exists (or should exist) for the benefit of the governed. Good governance tends to create societal conditions in which economic growth is possible, for example. The notion of governance by the consent of the governed leads us to consider the opening line, "I hate vain thoughts." The vanity that the psalmist is describing is not just thoughtlessness. The word translated "vain thoughts" is סֵעָרָה (pronounced say-afe'), a word derived from a primitive root meaning to divide up. Hence "vain thoughts" describes what James refers to as double-mindedness.⁸⁷⁴ It also has a connotation of skepticism as opposed to faith which takes God at His word.⁸⁷⁵ The psalmist is referring to skeptics who question the stability of God's law (and His wise governance). Their mocking taunt is that of the adversary and tempter "Yea, hath God said?"⁸⁷⁶ Such double mindedness gives rise to thoughts that are fundamentally rebellious against the government of God.⁸⁷⁷ Just as the psalmist loves "thy law", so he hates "vain thoughts." The psalmist willingly depends upon the just governance of God. But there are those, who's

⁸⁷³ We do well, in this regard to remember and reflect upon the passage of Paul to the believers in Rome who tells us that human governance is 'ordained of God'.

"Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers. For there is no power but of God: the powers that be are ordained of God. Whosoever therefore resists the power resists the ordinance of God: and they that resist shall receive to themselves damnation. For rulers are not a terror to good works, but to the evil. Wilt thou then not be afraid of the power? do that which is good, and thou shalt have praise of the same: For he is the minister of God to thee for good. But if thou do that which is evil, be afraid; for he beareth not the sword in vain: for he is the minister of God, a revenger to execute wrath upon him that doeth evil. Wherefore ye must needs be subject, not only for wrath, but also for conscience sake. For for this cause pay ye tribute (*i.e. taxes*) also: for they are God's ministers, attending continually upon this very thing.

Render therefore to all their dues: tribute to whom tribute is due; custom to whom custom; fear to whom fear; honor to whom honor." - Romans 13:1-7

This of course raises the issue of governments who do evil to their citizenry. The verse suggests a mirroring accountability not only of that enjoined upon the believers 'for conscience sake' but upon rulers. If they sear their consciences, through crimes against humanity, then there is a greater Judge Who will hold them accountable.

⁸⁷⁴ James 1:8 "A double minded man is unstable in all his ways."

⁸⁷⁵ This is why James presents the characteristic of double-mindedness in the context of prayer. "Jas 1:5-8 "If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him. But let him ask in faith, nothing wavering. For he that wavereth is like a wave of the sea driven with the wind and tossed. For let not that man think that he shall receive any thing of the Lord. A double minded man is unstable in all his ways.

⁸⁷⁶ Genesis 3:1 "Now the serpent was more subtle than any beast of the field which the LORD God had made. And he said unto the woman, 'Yea, hath God said, Ye shall not eat of every tree of the garden?'"

⁸⁷⁷ Obviously not all questioning of God's word is wrong. We question in order to learn. To ask what has God really said in order to understand it better, is vastly different than questioning God's authority when He speaks.

'questioning' reflects an unremitting hatred of that governance. The verse doubtless looks back to mindset of "the wicked have laid a snare for me" (110a) and those of whom he could say "I am afflicted very much" (107a). Their manifest hatred of the psalmist was not so much directed against him as an individual but against him as the servant of the LORD. Their primary hatred was directed at God. There is a mystery in all this, which the psalmist presents elsewhere ⁸⁷⁸ as a question about the reasons for rebellion against God.

"Why do the heathen rage,
And the people imagine a vain ⁸⁷⁹ thing?
The kings of the earth set themselves,
And the rulers take counsel together,
Against the LORD,
And against his anointed, saying,
Let us break their bands asunder,
And cast away their cords from us."

The 'vain imaginations' here are not unlike the "vain thoughts" in 119:113. Both are the products of a mind set on rebellion against the governance of God. The bands that the wicked desire to break asunder are the laws of God and the cords that they seek to cast away are the cords of the love that should bind their hearts to the LORD. Such hateful thoughts are also hurtful. To refuse the support of God's governance is to destroy one's eternal life support system. ⁸⁸⁰ They reflect a more ancient conflict of wills.

"How art thou fallen from heaven,
O Lucifer, son of the morning!
How art thou cut down to the ground,
Which didst weaken the nations!
For thou hast said in thine heart,
I will ascend into heaven,
I will exalt my throne above the stars of God:
I will sit also upon the mount of the congregation,
In the sides of the north:
I will ascend above the heights of the clouds;
I will be like the most High."⁸⁸¹

⁸⁷⁸ Psalm 2:1-3

⁸⁷⁹ Here the word translated "vanity" is different: רִיק (pronounced reek) meaning empty. It comes from a primitive root קוצר (pronounced rook) meaning to pour out. It has the connotation of worthlessness because of emptiness, like a thrown away bottle which serves no purpose because it is empty. The thoughts of the double minded are empty; devoid of faith in God's word.

⁸⁸⁰ It should also be clear that "vain thoughts" do not reflect a valid a desire for independence from an unjust system of human governance (i.e. dictatorship) in favor of a more just system human governance (i.e. democracy).

⁸⁸¹ Isaiah 14:12 - 14

So too, the afflictions of the Psalmist presage the sufferings of another. The kings of the earth set themselves against God and take counsel against His Anointed – His Christ, for such is the meaning of the title. To return hate for God’s love is folly, indeed. And to plot rebellion against God’s omnipotence is vanity indeed. But that is just what people unknowingly do when they reject the LORD’s Christ. They make war against their own salvation. The culmination of what lies under this verse is that which (eschatologically) drives the whole of the last book of the Bible.

“God is our Refuge and Strength”

¹¹⁴ Thou art my hiding place and my shield:
I hope in thy word.



In verse 113 we considered how the psalmist has made a choice between double mindedness and total commitment. Goldingay explains the tension of verse 113 through the comparison of the words translated love (אהב aw-hab') and hate (שנא saw-nay') which areonyms.

I am against divided people
And I am dedicated to your teaching ⁸⁸²

As Goldingay’s translation makes clear, people who are divided in their allegiance to God’s guidance and governance are anathema to the psalmist who is totally committed to that authority. When, in verse 114, he views God as his shield and his hiding place, it is more than a statement about protection from the withering attacks of the adversaries already mentioned. It is a statement of trust in God as part of the testimony of his love. Trust of the beloved is integral to our love for them. It is also telling us that one of the roles of all good government and certainly divine government is the security of the governed from violence directed against them. The psalmist is telling us that government of God is worthy of his trust (and ours) for security and safety. There are several metaphors for the security and safety that the faithful find in God: a tower or fortress, ⁸⁸³ a strong hold, ⁸⁸⁴ a rock.⁸⁸⁵ But, regardless of the metaphor, the affective evidence of that trust is the absence of fear.

God is our refuge and strength,
A very present help in trouble.
Therefore will not we fear, though the earth be removed,

⁸⁸² Goldingay Psalms Vol. 3, page 423

⁸⁸³ Psalm 144:1-2 Blessed be the LORD my strength, which teacheth my hands to war, and my fingers to fight: My goodness, and my fortress; my high tower, and my deliverer; my shield, and he in whom I trust; who subdueth my people under me.

⁸⁸⁴ Nahum 1:7 The LORD is good, a strong hold in the day of trouble; and he knoweth them that trust in him.

⁸⁸⁵ Psalm 18:2 The LORD is my rock, and my fortress, and my deliverer; my God, my strength, in whom I will trust; my buckler, and the horn of my salvation, and my high tower.

And though the mountains be carried into the midst of the sea;
Though the waters thereof roar and be troubled,
Though the mountains shake with the swelling thereof.

Selah.⁸⁸⁶

Taken together these testimonies of trust borne of love and the absence of fear confirm what John tells us. "There is no fear in love; but perfect love casteth out fear: because fear hath torment. He that feareth is not made perfect in love."⁸⁸⁷ Of course the fear of which John speaks is the fear of men, not the fear of God. The love of God and the fear of the LORD are both the norms of relationship with the Most High. That the fear of men and the fear of God are incompatible is made clear by Jesus' admonition: "And fear not them which kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul: but rather fear him which is able to destroy both soul and body in hell."⁸⁸⁸ Not only does the love of God displace the fear of men (as in the case of the psalmist here) but the fear of the Lord does as well. As one cannot serve God and Mammon,⁸⁸⁹ even so one cannot fear God and man. This realization brings us to the crux of the matter, not of competing bases for security, but of the *modus operandi* of two very different forms of governance. Lying at the core of the Torah, the law is the love of God and one's neighbor.⁸⁹⁰ Lying at the root of the adversary's form of governance is fear.⁸⁹¹ The psalmist's adversaries had sought by their evil designs against him, to deter him from his unswerving devotion to God through fear of what they could do to him. He refused. Instead, as we saw in earlier verses, he proclaimed, "Thy testimonies ... are the rejoicing of my heart. ... Thy law do I love." (111 & 113b)

But the psalmist does not stop with the testimony of his trust in God as his shield/hiding place. He also speaks to us of his hope in God. In 114b we reach and exceed the limits of the metaphor. A shield and a hiding place are passive forms of defense. They remove the individual from the flight of arrows or the reach of projectiles, but no more. They preserve life but do not protect life it by taking aggressive action against the adversary. There is a difference between the turtle's shell and the tiger's

⁸⁸⁶ Psalm 46:1 - 3

⁸⁸⁷ 1 John 4:18

⁸⁸⁸ Matthew 10:28 see also Luke 12:4 - 5 "And I say unto you my friends, Be not afraid of them that kill the body, and after that have no more that they can do. But I will forewarn you whom ye shall fear: Fear him, which after he hath killed hath power to cast into hell; yea, I say unto you, Fear him."

⁸⁸⁹ Matthew 6:24 "No man can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon."

⁸⁹⁰ Mark 12:28 - 31 "And one of the scribes came, and having heard them reasoning together, and perceiving that he had answered them well, asked him, Which is the first commandment of all? And Jesus answered him, The first of all the commandments is, Hear, O Israel; The Lord our God is one Lord: And thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and with all thy strength: this is the first commandment. And the second is like, namely this, Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself. There is none other commandment greater than these."

⁸⁹¹ Heb 2:14 - 15 "Forasmuch then as the children are partakers of flesh and blood, he also himself likewise took part of the same; that through death he might destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the devil; And deliver them who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage."

claws. But the governance of God is both passive and active in the pursuit of the welfare of its citizenry. In 114b the psalmist is referring to the pending action of God against his adversaries. "I hope in thy word." His refusal to act out of fear is rooted his hope of active defense as well as his faith in a passive one. As yet, however, he does not see the hand of God raised against his adversaries. Clearly between the passive protection of God (in the present) and the active destruction of His enemies (in the future) there is a hiatus that argues the patience of God while He awaits the repentance of those who foolishly oppose His governance. But that time, though long is not unlimited. Nineveh (modern day Mosul in Iraq) provides an excellent illustration of this. Unwilling Jonah was sent to a sinful Nineveh with a message of repentance which they heard and obeyed staying the city's destruction.⁸⁹² Over a century later Nahum was sent to the same city. As the capital of the ruthless Assyrian Empire, it had broad walls of over eight miles with fifteen gates and as many as fifteen hundred towers.

"God is jealous, and the LORD revengeth; the LORD revengeth, and is furious; the LORD will take vengeance on his adversaries, and he reserveth wrath for his enemies. The LORD is slow to anger, and great in power, and will not at all acquit the wicked: the LORD hath his way in the whirlwind and in the storm, and the clouds are the dust of his feet. ... Who can stand before his indignation? And who can abide in the fierceness of his anger? His fury is poured out like fire, and the rocks are thrown down by him. The LORD is good, a strong hold in the day of trouble; and he knoweth them that trust in him."⁸⁹³ But with an overrunning flood he will make an utter end of the place thereof, and darkness shall pursue his enemies. What do ye imagine against the LORD? he will make an utter end: affliction shall not rise up the second time."⁸⁹⁴

It is this demonstration of power that the psalmist patiently awaits as he says with simplicity "I hope in thy word."

⁸⁹² Jonah 3:4 – 5, 10 And Jonah began to enter into the city a day's journey and he cried, and said, 'Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown.' So the people of Nineveh believed God, and proclaimed a fast, and put on sackcloth, from the greatest of them even to the least of them. ... And God saw their works that they turned from their evil way; and God repented of the evil, that he had said that he would do unto them; and he did it not." (ca. 785-770 b.c.)

⁸⁹³ It is amazing that even as God threatens the imminent destruction of the city of Nineveh, He likens Himself to a 'strong tower' implying that the condemned inhabitants of the city still had an avenue of mercy open to them. They had 1500 towers all of which would fail. But there was one 'tower' who would be a refuge if the repentant seized the opportunity to 'trust in Him.' What a choice 1500 worthless towers and one that meant safety and deliverance! It leaves us with wonder who, if any, chose to trust God than the vain defenses of man?

⁸⁹⁴ Nahum 1:2 – 3, 6 – 9

Separation

¹¹⁵ Depart from me, ye evildoers:
For I will keep the commandments of my God.



It is relatively easy to see the relation of this verse to verse 113. In verse 113, vain or evil thoughts were in view. Here evil doers are in view. The two verses are inevitably related. As a man thinks in his heart, so is he. ⁸⁹⁵ Thought begets action. If in verse 113 the psalmist hated vain thoughts because he loved God's law, here in verse 115 he demands that evil doers depart from him because he desires to "keep the commandments of my God." There are at least three basic lessons that lie behind this verse and that bear repeating, though they are familiar.

1. The thought life is hidden from us, because we cannot see the heart of man.⁸⁹⁶

There is a step forward taken between verse 113 and verse 115. In verse 113, the psalmist may detest lack of commitment and recognize that all such double-mindedness is fertile ground for rebellion against the governance of God, but he cannot definitively know what any particular person is actually thinking. It is more of a statement in abstract that reveals to us the heart of the psalmist than the heart of his adversaries. As to specific individuals around him whose heart reasoning's are detested, he really cannot know for sure exactly who they are. Their profession may be sound in form but are they sincere? ⁸⁹⁷ Since he cannot assess the heart at this point, the psalmist simply says that he hates all such vain thought, but he cannot give any person specific orders until he actually knows and that requires observation not of speech but action, because -

2. Words may deceive, but actions speak louder than words.

It is when the psalmist wants to translate his love of God's law into the action of keeping God's commandments that there comes a revelation of the character of those around him. This is like two men meeting in a wood on a particularly dark night. Since neither can see the path, they sit down and await the dawn together. As the sun arises and it grows progressively lighter, the one stands up and starts down the path. The

⁸⁹⁵ The common proverb is a variant of that which is found in Proverbs 23:6 -7 "Eat thou not the bread of him that hath an evil eye, neither desire thou his dainty meats: For as he thinketh in his heart, so is he: Eat and drink, saith he to thee; but his heart is not with thee." The term "evil eye" here is not a superstitious reference but a careful tool of discernment. If you want to know what a man thinks in his heart, watch the direction of his eye. If he is single minded, his gaze will be steadfast. But if he is a double minded man, his eye will shift from one object of desire to another. His eye is evil not because of an innate curse, but because the divided will spoken of in verse 113 ("I hate vain (of double-minded) thoughts") drives the shifting gaze in verse 115.

⁸⁹⁶ 1 Corinthians 2:11 For what man knoweth the things of a man, save the spirit of man which is in him? Even so the things of God knoweth no man, but the Spirit of God.

⁸⁹⁷ Many believe that sincere comes from the Latin "sine cera" meaning without wax. When a statue was damaged, a dishonest sculptor might fill in the void with wax mixed with marble dust. In the heat, the wax would melt and the fault be revealed. So for the buyer, it was important that the sculptor affirm that the work was "without wax". It is a colorful etymology, but may not be accurate. In any case the meaning is clear pure or of unmixed motives.

other begins to stumble into every obstacle and has great difficulty on the same path. At night without light both were blind. But when the light arises the difference between conditional blindness of the one and structural blindness of the other becomes manifest. Of the former, it might be said, "The people which sat in darkness saw great light"⁸⁹⁸ And it was this illumination that allowed the psalmist to discern the vain thoughts of those around him, and to require that manifest evil doers "depart from me." The psalmist's words anticipate the dreadful words of the judge of all the earth who will one day pronounce, "I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity."⁸⁹⁹

But the question remains why such a severe requirement? Why ask the evildoers to depart from him? Should the psalmist not have been more compassionate, more understanding, more patient as God is? Perhaps if he had allowed them to stay in his company, they might have seen how good it was to keep God's commandments and perhaps come to repentance? The psalmist acts as he does because he knows the third basic principle.

3. "Evil communications corrupt good manners"⁹⁰⁰

This simple saying has both a positive and a negative application. In the positive sense fellowship with people of like spiritual desires has the tendency to enlighten the mind and strengthen the will. It passes under the Biblical rubric "iron sharpeneth iron."⁹⁰¹ But it is the negative sense that the psalmist sees here. The psalmist knows that in the spiritual life, the believer does well to limit or avoid altogether social concourse with those who have chosen to remain unrepentant. Those who do not share in the spiritual direction of the repentant sinner will view present altered behavior as strange so that they speak ill of you.⁹⁰² To have to fight against the rationalizations and half-truths that

⁸⁹⁸ Matthew 4:16 "The people which sat in darkness saw great light; and to them which sat in the region and shadow of death light is sprung up."

⁸⁹⁹ The saying is taken from a prophetic discourse of Jesus found in Matthew 7:22 - 27

"Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? And in thy name have cast out devils? And in thy name done many wonderful works? And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity. Therefore, whosoever heareth these sayings of mine, and doeth them, I will liken him unto a wise man, which built his house upon a rock: And the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house; and it fell not: for it was founded upon a rock. And every one that heareth these sayings of mine, and doeth them not, shall be likened unto a foolish man, which built his house upon the sand: And the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house; and it fell: and great was the fall of it."

Here again, the emphasis is on the revelatory nature of the actions people take and not just on what they say. Of course, we now recognize that the actions of the elect of God are rooted in the enabling grace of God. It is faith in Jesus' sayings that brings for the grace to do as He has said. The evil doers rejected here had actions, but theirs were actions of their own devices. We prophesied in your name. We cast our demons in your name. We did wonderful works in your name. Yet for all that they were still pronounced workers of iniquity, because their works were evidently of their own devising and not in obedience to Jesus' directions. They were works of self will and not grace.

⁹⁰⁰ 1 Corinthians 15:33 "Be not deceived: evil communications corrupt good manners." Paul quotes from Menander's his lost play *Thais*

⁹⁰¹ Proverbs 27:17 "Iron sharpeneth iron; so a man sharpeneth the countenance of his friend."

⁹⁰² Peter describes this situation to his young believers when he writes in 1 Peter 4:3 - 5 "For the time past of our life may suffice us to have wrought the will of the Gentiles, when we walked in lasciviousness, lusts, excess of wine, revelings, banquetings, and

underlie their ill behavior is a task that the young believer is not yet prepared for. The temptation to lapse back into a godless life style is just too great and the risk almost assured. If repentance were ever to be granted to those who oppose the truth, it is this willingness to put them away from the believer's company altogether that has the greatest chance of effectiveness.

In our day, we see both the positive and negative aspects of this in the church. Within the fellowship the young believer is steadily confirmed in their faith.⁹⁰³ Yet the church itself maintains a separation (not isolation) from the world of sinners as a manifestation of its sanctity. It balances the message "Come unto me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest"⁹⁰⁴ with the demand, "Let everyone that nameth the name of Christ depart from iniquity."⁹⁰⁵

Supporting Dialogue

114b I hope in thy word.

...

116 Uphold me according unto thy word, that I may live:
And let me not be ashamed of my hope.



This colon is the first part of a two-part prayer in this octave for life (116) and for safety (117). It builds on the notion of **ו** samach which means to support. In this verse, psalmist pleads with God to uphold or support his life. Verse 114b ("I hope in thy word.") elucidates the parallelism of this verset. In 114b, psalmist is telling us that God has spoken a word to him and that he, in response, has hoped in that word. Verse 116, which couples "thy word ... my hope" emphasizes the relationship the psalmist has with the LORD by referring back to the communication described in 114b. But this verse also amplifies the thought introduced earlier. At first, he only said "I hope" but did not tell us what he was hoping for. Here it is very plain. The psalmist hopes for life-giving support from God according to His word. At first, he did not tell us what was at risk as he chose his response to that dialogue (to believe or not to believe the word spoken). Here he pleads that God not allow him to be ashamed because he has chosen to believe

abominable idolatries: wherein they think it strange that ye run not with them to the same excess of riot, speaking evil of you: who (*i.e. the revelers*) shall give account to him that is ready to judge the quick and the dead."

⁹⁰³ Acts 14:21-23 And when they (*i.e. Paul and Barnabas*) had preached the gospel to that city, and had taught many, they returned again to Lystra, and to Iconium, and Antioch, confirming the souls of the disciples, and exhorting them to continue in the faith, and that we must through much tribulation enter into the kingdom of God. And when they had ordained them elders in every church, and had prayed with fasting, they commended them to the Lord, on whom they believed.

⁹⁰⁴ Matthew 11:28

⁹⁰⁵ 2 Timothy 2:19 "Nevertheless the foundation of God standeth sure, having this seal, The Lord knoweth them that are his. And, Let every one that nameth the name of Christ depart from iniquity."

God's word. But why does the psalmist feel the need to be supported (or upheld) by God in the first place. Can't he stand on his own two feet?

The experiential need for God's support that prompts this prayer argues the presence forces that would threaten to overwhelm him. The spiritual direction and force of the psalmist's life has been growing in the preceding verses. "Thy law do I love. ... I hope in thy word ... I will keep the commandments of my God." His 'spiritual momentum' and the widening rift with others whose double mindedness is revealed by their evildoing have both culminated in the command "Depart from me, ye evildoers." But evildoers do not have a tendency to respond meekly to such directives. The psalmist is either expecting or receiving "pushback."

Whenever we make a decision to alter the set-point of relationships, especially sick or toxic ones, pushback can involve emotional or physical violence. While the righteous may interact with us in love and seek to motivate our willing response by means of enlightened self-interest, the wicked seek to manipulate by fear and often control with violence. Many a person has been threatened by emotional and even physical violence (and some have been injured or murdered) when they try to end a fundamentally sick relationship in favor of another healthier, more liberating, and fulfilling relationship. Whether it is a society trying to rise up against a ruthless dictator or an abused spouse trying to be free from an abusive mate, saying things like "Depart from me, ye evildoers" can be very dangerous. The psalmist's prayer for God's life-assuring support is entirely understandable given his situation.

If the first part of the prayer is understandable, what does the second half convey to us? The phrase "ashamed of my hope" carries a certain temporal urgency that underlies the basic plea that God would uphold his life according to His word. The word translated "ashamed" is בּוֹשׁ (pronounced boosh), a primitive root meaning properly to pale and by implication to be ashamed or disappointed because of delay. There is also a different (but not conceptually unrelated) word in 116b that is translated as hope. In 114b the word translated hope is יַחַל (pronounced yaw-chal'), a primitive root meaning to wait and by implication, to be patient. In 116b the word translated hope is שָׁבֵר (pronounced say'-ber) from a primitive root שָׁבַר (pronounced saw-bar') which means to scrutinize. So שָׁבֵר means, by implication, to watch with patient expectation. In 114b the psalmist is saying that he is content to wait patiently (i.e. to hope) for the fulfillment of God's word to him. But as the pressure of the pushback rises, the focus shifts to waiting with patient expectation that the fulfillment will not be long delayed which delay would cause him to pale with fear at the approaching threat to his life.⁹⁰⁶ In short, the willing obedience

⁹⁰⁶ The latter word שָׁבֵר (pronounced say'-ber) is rare occurring only one other time in the Old Testament in Psalm 146:5 "Happy <esher> is he that hath the God of Jacob for his help, whose hope (שָׁבֵר) is in the LORD his God" It is interesting to note the linkage between the word for happiness that introduced this psalm and the word for expectation that occurs in only these two places.

of the psalmist has made the fulfillment of God's promise even more urgent and any delay now becomes a real trial of the psalmist's faith. If God does not act, the psalmist may be either forced away from his high resolve or be overcome by the antipathy of those whose hatred blisters with the fires of hell. But God knows exactly when to intervene and both parts of the psalmist's prayer (for life and for safety) look ahead to verses 118 and 119a,

¹¹⁸ Thou hast trodden down all them that err from thy statutes:
For their deceit is falsehood.

^{119b} Thou puttest away all the wicked of the earth like dross:

As usual, we must consider what the psalmist's experience and testimony have to say to us in our day. While our desire to be obedient to God may produce a visceral dislike of evil and a desire to be free from evil doers, we are not always living under a physical threat. So why then plead with God for His support of our lives? The answer should be obvious. We are continually engaged in a spiritual combat.

*"Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might. Put on the whole armor of God that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places. Wherefore take unto you the whole armor of God that ye may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand."*⁹⁰⁷

As our warfare is spiritual, so our support for that combat must be spiritual. It must be imparted to us through our spiritual relationship with God. In short, we live (and struggle) not by our own strength, cleverness, or natural ability; but by the grace of God through Jesus Christ our prayerful Intercessor. "Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need."⁹⁰⁸

Safety in Strength

¹¹⁶ Uphold me according unto thy word, that I may live:
And let me not be ashamed of my hope.

¹¹⁷ Hold thou me up, and I shall be safe:
And I will have respect unto thy statutes continually.



In this octave, verse 117 is the second part of a two-part prayer for life (116) and for safety (117). As with the first part, it builds on the notion of **ס** samach which means to support. In verse 116 the word translated "uphold" is **סמך** (pronounced saw-mak') a

⁹⁰⁷ Ephesians 6:10-13

⁹⁰⁸ Hebrews 4:16

primitive root meaning to prop (literally or figuratively) as a gardener would support a grape vine, for instance. Reflexively it means to lean upon or take hold of. The psalmist is telling us that if the LORD does not support him, he will 'fall over' before the reactionary pressures of the wicked. The word translated "hold" in 117 is סעד (pronounced saw-ad') which is also a primitive root meaning to support but it is usually used in a figurative sense. It means to comfort, to establish, to refresh, or to strengthen. In these two verses we see the same shift that we saw in verse 114. There the psalmist's testimony shifted from confessing that God was his passive defense ("Thou art my hiding place and my shield") to expressing his need for a more active defense ("I hope in thy word." – i.e. *I am looking forward to the redemption of your promise to defend me by taking vengeance on the wicked who oppose me as I strive to keep your commandments*). It is not enough, however, for the psalmist to survive the assaults of his adversaries, and go on living. It is also desirable that he triumph over them. Accordingly, the support sought in 117 is not that of a passive pole for a weak plant, but a sword for a vigorous hand. In this latter part of his prayer, the psalmist pleads for the comfort and safety that strength brings. And that safety involves activity not just on God's part but also on the part of the psalmist.

"Blessed be the LORD my strength,
 Which teacheth my hands to war,
 And my fingers to fight:
 My goodness, and my fortress;
 My high tower, and my deliverer;
 My shield, and he in whom I trust;
 Who subdueth my people under me."⁹⁰⁹

Not only is God the psalmist's hiding place and shield (and fortress, and high tower, and deliverer), He is also the psalmist's mentor in the art of spiritual (and sometimes physical) warfare. He places a sword in the raw recruit's hand and teaches him how to wield it. But in the end, it is God, not the psalmist, who "subdues my people under me." Verse 117 also goes beyond verse 114b. When the psalmist said "I hope in thy word", he did not imply that he was involved in any active way in that hope. But here, when he pleads that God would hold him up (i.e. strengthen him) we begin to see that the psalmist is willing to play an active role in his own deliverance from the opposition of those whom he has told to depart from him so that he might keep the commandments of his God. (115)

It is important for us to note again this delicate balance of activity and passivity when it involves the spiritual conflicts of our own lives. On the one hand we recognize that we

⁹⁰⁹ Psalm 144:1-2 There are similar passages in 2 Samuel 22:35 ("He teacheth my hands to war; so that a bow of steel is broken by mine arms"), and Psalm 18:34 ("He teacheth my hands to war, so that a bow of steel is broken by mine arms.").

can, of ourselves, do nothing. Even Jesus will say “I do nothing of myself.” Doing nothing of oneself, however, is not the same as doing nothing at all. In His ministry, Jesus says and does many things. But He never speaks or acts of His own volition. The things that He speaks and the things that He does are those that “my Father hath taught me.”⁹¹⁰ What was true of Jesus is also true of the psalmist. And it should be true of us. Our involvement in our spiritual lives is always insufficient of ourselves. We can do very little, if anything, to effect spiritual victory. But our involvement is critical as an evidence of our belief in God’s word. Our hope is the same as the psalmist’s, that God would redeem His word, his promises to us for life and safety. He chooses to involve us in that activity in ways that are, of themselves, insufficient but very necessary nevertheless, because our involvement is evidence of our faith. In the spiritual life hope (passive belief) and faith (active belief) go hand in hand. We have our part – the part that God in His wisdom assigns to us – in which we demonstrate our trust; and God has His part in which He demonstrates His fidelity, His wisdom, and His power. The former is our faith by which we (along with Jesus) overcome the world.⁹¹¹ The latter is that which is rooted in the grace of God by which we rejoice in hope of His glory.⁹¹²

But what is the *denouement* of this delicate balance of passivity and activity, of faith and hope? The psalmist tells the LORD that if He will grant him life and safety; he will “have respect unto thy statutes continually.” What does this mean? The meaning rests upon the word “respect”. It is the word שׁעַר (pronounced shaw-aw’) a primitive root which means to gaze at or about (properly, for help). By implication it means to inspect, to consider, to enter into the feelings of, to be nonplussed as when looking around in amazement or bewilderment. In short to respect the statutes is to hold them steadfastly in view for many reasons most of which are linked to wonder. And wonder is one of the essential foundations of worship. The psalmist is telling God if He grants him a safe life it will be characterized by a steadfast viewing of His statutes born of sense of their inherent worth and God’s worthiness. It is exactly this which lies behind the worship of the blessed in John’s Apocalyptic Vision.

“And they sung a new song, saying, Thou art worthy to take the book, and to open the seals thereof: for thou wast slain, and hast redeemed us to God by thy blood out of every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation; And hast made us unto our God kings and priests: and we shall reign on the earth.”⁹¹³

⁹¹⁰ John 8:28 Then said Jesus unto them, When ye have lifted up the Son of man, then shall ye know that I am he, and that I do nothing of myself; but as my Father hath taught me, I speak these things.

⁹¹¹ John 16:32 - 33 Behold, the hour cometh, yea, is now come, that ye shall be scattered, every man to his own, and shall leave me alone: and yet I am not alone, because the Father is with me. These things I have spoken unto you, that in me ye might have peace. In the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world.

⁹¹² Romans 5:1 -2 Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ: By whom also we have access by faith into this grace wherein we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God.

⁹¹³ Revelation 5:9

Revealing God

117 Hold thou me up, and I shall be safe:

And I will have respect unto thy statutes continually.

118 Thou hast trodden down all them that err from thy statutes:

For their deceit is falsehood.



In verse 118, the psalmist again presents a contrasting picture between himself and the evildoers that he rejects. If God will uphold him and keep him safe, then he will be able to lead a life of enrapt consideration of the LORD's statutes. He "will have respect unto thy statutes continually." As for the persons whose hearts are full of vain or divided thoughts, who are not totally committed to the service of God, they "err from thy statutes." The word translated err is שָׁגָה (pronounced shaw-gaw') a primitive root meaning to stray or causatively mislead another. "Cursed be he that maketh the blind to wander (שָׁגָה - *shagah*) out of the way."⁹¹⁴ It also suggests deception. Speaking of God, Job says, "With him (*i.e. with God*) is strength and wisdom: the deceived {שָׁגָה *shagag* - *that is one who has strayed*} and the deceiver {שָׁגָה *shagah* - *that is one who has caused another to stray*} are his."⁹¹⁵ The word also includes the concept of sinning through ignorance. "And if the whole congregation of Israel sin through ignorance (שָׁגָה - *shagah*), ... then the congregation shall offer a young bullock for the sin."⁹¹⁶ There is also a progression in this verse from earlier assertions in this octave. To foolishly vacillate on truth (*i.e.* vain thoughts ~ 113a) is the internal disposition which leads to people straying from God's statutes (*i.e.* evildoing ~ 115a). And that straying (*i.e.* erring - שָׁגָה ~ 118a) is what lies at the root of their uttering falsehood in order to deceive (~118b). The psalmist is telling us that those whose hearts are prone to vain or double-minded thoughts do so because they willfully ignore the claim of God's truth⁹¹⁷ to absolute acceptance and allegiance. In willfully ignoring the claims nascent in the truth, they set about by their speech to mislead others into following their pernicious ways. Hence in 118b, when the psalmist explains why God has trodden down all such persons, he makes mention of their "deceit" and "falsehood."

⁹¹⁴ Deuteronomy 27:18a

⁹¹⁵ Job 12:16

⁹¹⁶ Leviticus 4:13 -14 "And if the whole congregation of Israel sin through ignorance (שָׁגָה - *shagah*), and the thing be hid from the eyes of the assembly, and they have done somewhat against any of the commandments of the LORD concerning things which should not be done, and are guilty; When the sin, which they have sinned against it, is known, then the congregation shall offer a young bullock for the sin, and bring him before the tabernacle of the congregation."

⁹¹⁷ Specifically the truth as revealed in His commandments and statutes: Psalm 119:10 "With my whole heart have I sought thee: O let me not wander <shagah> from thy commandments." Psalm 119:21 "Thou hast rebuked the proud that are cursed, which do err <shagah> from thy commandments." Psalm 119:118 "Thou hast trodden down all them that err <shagah> from thy statutes: for their deceit is falsehood."

But why does the psalmist suddenly shift his focus away from his present moment of distress to God's actions in the past? He pleads:

¹¹⁶ Uphold me according unto thy word that I may live:

And let me not be ashamed of my hope.

¹¹⁷ Hold thou me up, and I shall be safe

And I will have respect unto thy statutes continually.

Then he goes on to say: "Thou hast trodden down all them that err from thy statutes. ... Thou puttest away all the wicked of the earth like dross." In shifting the focus from himself in the present moment to God's actions in the past, the psalmist gives us some of the reasons why he hopes in God's word. The psalmist understands God's character based on His past actions. Accordingly, he pleads that, as God has been for others, so He will be for him. Verses 117 and 118, then, are part of the argument on which the psalmist bases his plea for life and safety.

But these verses also say something about God, Himself. As God cannot lie, so He too hates vain thoughts as the psalmist does. As the psalmist "has respect unto thy statutes continually"; so too God has continual re-spect (i.e. a looking again and again) at the psalmist as well as all of those who trust in Him. "For the eyes of the LORD run to and fro throughout the whole earth, to shew himself strong in the behalf of them whose heart is perfect toward him."⁹¹⁸ And "The eyes of the LORD are upon the righteous, and his ears are open unto their cry."⁹¹⁹ Jesus paints this very picture in His sermon on the mount.

"Are not two sparrows sold for a farthing? ... (and) are not five sparrows sold for two farthings, and not one of them is forgotten before God? ... (And) one of them shall not fall on the ground without your Father. ... But even the very hairs of your head are all numbered. Fear not therefore: ye are of more value than many sparrows."⁹²⁰

In revealing his reasons for loving God's law and for hoping in God's word; in rejecting evildoers and in pleading to have God as his **נ** samech – support, the psalmist becomes something of a revelation of God, Himself. Not only is the image of God (though marred by sin in the psalmist) far from being totally effaced, it is being restored in the struggles and the longings that he suffers. His relationship with God is ultimately

⁹¹⁸ 2 Chronicles 16:9a

⁹¹⁹ Psalm 34:15

⁹²⁰ The passage, which is a conflation of Matthew 10:29 and Luke 12:6 – 7, is interesting because it reveals a marketing practice common in our day: the more you buy, the less you pay per item. In this case, the pricing scheme is two sparrows for a farthing and five for two farthings, which is to say that the fifth sparrow is thrown in for nothing. It is a picturesque way of saying the when men place no value on the fifth sparrow, God does. We know this is so because Jesus then tells his hearers that "not one of them (i.e. the fifth sparrow) shall fall to the ground without God's knowledge because He does not forget even the least of His feathered creation but takes note of each one life. If He does this for birds, shall He not be totally consistent and do it for each of those who trust Him? And to strengthen the point, Jesus goes on to tell them that because they are of more worth than many sparrows, the very hairs of their head are all numbered (i.e. serialized).

transforming. While those that err from God's statutes are trodden down of Him; those who have continual respect for them are held up by the Almighty amid all the storms of life.⁹²¹

What Will God Do?

- ¹¹⁸ Thou hast trodden down all them that err from thy statutes:
For their deceit is falsehood.
- ¹¹⁹ Thou puttest away all the wicked of the earth like dross:
Therefore I love thy testimonies.



Five times in this octave, the psalmist has described those whom he detests and from whom he wishes to be separated. Although he uses different terms, it is clear that he is describing the same class of individuals. They are a people of vain thoughts, a people of divided loyalties, or double minded (113a). They are evil doers or wrong doers (115a). They err from God's statutes (118a) and, in so doing, seek to lead others astray because their deceit is falsehood (118b). The wicked of the earth are a faithless people (119a).⁹²² But they are also a violent people and have continually been seen as a threat to the psalmist's life since he made his choice to follow God and not them (115). The psalmist's plea was based first on the role that he needed God to play in his life as his support. But seeing God as a passive defense (my hiding place and my shield) is not enough. The psalmist knows that he needs an active defense that will deliver him from the very presence of the wicked. Verses 118 and 119 describe God's past activity in delivering His own. "Thou hast trodden down all them that err from thy statutes ... Thou puttest away all the wicked of the earth like dross." The psalmist has heard of God's intervention and believes the (explicit or implicit) promise of deliverance that it contains ("I hope in thy word"). The argument of the psalmist's prayer for active protection and deliverance builds on what God has done in the past. But exactly what has God done? These verses tell us that He has "trodden down" and has "put away"

Trodden down: The word translated trodden down is סלה (pronounced saw-law') is a relatively rare word occurring only three other times in the Old Testament.⁹²³ It is a

⁹²¹ This is revelatory in the sense that the weak vine best shows forth the strength of the support to which it clings in the stormy night, not the sunny afternoon. But the Psalmist's revelation of God is also manifest in the character of the psalmist which is gradually being transformed to be more and more like that of God, Himself.

⁹²² There appears to be a morphology of sin in these descriptors as well. Beginning with the thought life (vain thoughts), the psalmist proceeds to describe the actions that follow – wrong doing. But their actions do not stop on the individual level. In erring or wandering from God's statutes, they seek to persuade others to follow by using falsehood to deceive. The psalmist finally goes on to describe their character – wicked or faithless. When the psalmist refuses to go along with their pernicious ways ("Depart from me, ye evildoers: for I will keep the commandments of my God") they pose a threat for against his life ("Uphold me ... that I may live: ... Hold thou me up, and I shall be safe").

⁹²³ Job 28:16 It cannot be valued (סלה) with the gold of Ophir, with the precious onyx, or the sapphire.

Job 28:19 The topaz of Ethiopia shall not equal it, neither shall it be valued (סלה) with pure gold.

primitive root word which means to hang up as if to weigh. It reflects the sense of evaluating the worth of something as weighed out against a standard weight as in business. It also has the sense of finding an equivalent to the weight of something in reference to another standard of value like gold or precious stones so that an exchange may be made. In either case it has to do with establishing worth. But its primary sense is symbolic, involving the emblem of the scales as an icon for the administration of justice. The wicked are (figuratively) weighed in the balance of justice against the truth of the very statutes they rejected and are found wanting and, therefore, guilty. ("Their deceit is falsehood") They are condemned as worthless. They are good for nothing but to be cast out and be trodden underfoot. This calls to mind the events of Daniel when he interpreted for Belshazzar the hand writing on the wall: "MENE, MENE, TEKEL, UPHARSIN."

MENE God hath numbered thy kingdom, and finished it.

TEKEL Thou art weighed in the balances, and art found wanting.

PERES Thy kingdom is divided, and given to the Medes and Persians."⁹²⁴

This judgment also occurs in Jesus' warning to His disciples.⁹²⁵ "Ye are the salt of the earth: but if the salt has lost his savor, wherewith shall it be salted? It is thenceforth good for nothing, but to be cast out, and to be trodden under foot of men."⁹²⁶

Put away: The word translated put away is שבת (pronounced shaw-bath') another primitive root word meaning to repose, that is to desist from exertion. It is sometimes used in relation to keeping the Sabbath (the 'rest') in which menial work is put away.⁹²⁷ In verse 119a, there is the awful sense that God has been exerting effort to bring these people to repentance and their constant double-mindedness and disobedience has given rise to His decision to stop trying. Again, there is an echo of God's suffering evil men and finally ceasing to deal with them.

Lamentations 1:15a The Lord hath trodden under foot (סלה) all my mighty men in the midst of me ...

⁹²⁴ Daniel 5:25-28. The word for "weighed" here is תקל (pronounced tek-al') which is the Aramaic equivalent of the Hebrew שקל (pronounced shaw-kal') a primitive root meaning to suspend or poise (especially in trade). Though different, the sense is contiguous. The wicked like Belshazzar are weighed in the balance and judgment is passed. In Belshazzar's case, "in that night was Belshazzar the king of the Chaldeans slain." (Daniel 5:30)

⁹²⁵ Matthew 5:13

⁹²⁶ "Ye are the salt of the earth.' Salt renders food pleasant and palatable, and preserves from putrefaction. Christians, by their lives and instructions, are to keep the world from entire moral corruption. By bringing down, by their prayers, the blessing of God, and by their influence and example, they save the world from universal vice and crime. 'Salt have lost his savor.' That is, if it has become insipid, tasteless, or have lost its preserving properties. ... In eastern countries ... the salt used was impure, mingled with vegetable and earthy substances; so that it might lose the whole of its saltiness, and a considerable quantity of earthy matter remain. This was good for nothing, except that it was used, as it is said, to place in paths, or walks, as we use gravel. This kind of salt is common still in that country. It is found in the earth in veins or layers, and when exposed to the sun and rain, loses its saltiness entirely."

- Albert Barnes New Testament Commentary

⁹²⁷ Genesis 2:2 "And on the seventh day God ended his work which he had made; and he rested (שבת) on the seventh day from all his work which he had made."

“And GOD saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually. And it repented the LORD that he had made man on the earth, and it grieved him at his heart. And the LORD said, I will destroy man whom I have created from the face of the earth; both man, and beast, and the creeping thing, and the fowls of the air; for it repenteth me that I have made them.”⁹²⁸

God ‘repents’ because they are “dross” - **סִיג** (pronounced seeg) a word which derives from **סוּג** (pronounced soog) a primitive root meaning, properly, to flinch and, by implication, to go back, literally to retreat from or figuratively to apostatize. It has the sense of drawing back from refuse. They are utterly worthless and repulsive because they are revealed to be the garbage they espoused all their lives. This is the judgment and condemnation that the psalmist anticipates will come to the wicked, as it has to others in the past. It is frightening in its extremity and irreversibility. No wonder he says “I love thy testimonies” (but) “I am afraid of thy judgments.” Here again, the fulfillment of all the law is to heartily love the Lord thy God and thy neighbor as thyself but the fear of the LORD is still the beginning of wisdom.

Jesus Saves

¹¹⁹ Thou puttest away all the wicked of the earth like dross:
Therefore I love thy testimonies.

¹²⁰ My flesh trembleth for fear of thee; and
I am afraid of thy judgments.



The last verse of this octave, in which the psalmist seeks God for his support, rounds out the affective spectrum that describes his relationship with God: “Thy law do I love ... I hope in thy word ... let me not be ashamed of my hope ... I will have respect unto thy statutes continually ... I love thy testimonies.” Finally, the psalmist says “My flesh trembleth for fear of thee; and I am afraid of thy judgments.” We can easily see the psalmist’s love for God in the first verses, but this last verse is very different from what has gone before. In the final testimony of the octave, we are confronted with the second of the two great themes of the Bible: the fear of the LORD. As has been pointed out by numerous commentators, the fear spoken of is really reverence and awe at the holiness, the greatness and the infinite power of God. And the verse is particularly appropriate in the light of the preceding two verses which testified of God’s righteous actions against the wicked: treading down all that err from His statutes and putting them all away like dross. The judgment of God is a fearful thing to behold, for even the righteous realize that it could be them that are the objects of His wrath. “Who shall

⁹²⁸ Genesis 6:5-7

ascend into the hill of the LORD? Or who shall stand in his holy place? ⁹²⁹ ... If thou, LORD, shouldest mark iniquities, O Lord, who shall stand?" ⁹³⁰ Malachi also, at the close of the Old Testament canon, cries out, "But who may abide the day of his coming? And who shall stand when he appeareth? For he is like a refiner's fire, and like fullers' soap." ⁹³¹ Of God's judgment being like an awesome, white hot "refiner's fire" the apostle says, "For we know him that hath said, Vengeance belongeth unto me, I will recompense, saith the Lord. And again, The Lord shall judge his people. It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God ⁹³² ... for our God is a consuming fire." ⁹³³ Surely the psalmist has this terrible conflagration in mind when he implies "... the wicked of the earth (*are*) like dross"

But the psalmist who remonstrates with the LORD about sinners standing in His presence, adds to his rhetorical question the very real possibility of forgiveness. "If thou, LORD, shouldest mark iniquities, O Lord, who shall stand? But there is forgiveness with thee, that thou mayest be feared." ⁹³⁴ The word translated "feared" is אָרָא (pronounced yaw-ray') is a primitive root meaning to fear but morally, to revere. It is the same word that is used in 120b "I am afraid (אָרָא) of thy judgments." This testimony explains how hope can adhere to fear. God has revealed through his word that He is a forgiving God. "Bless the LORD, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits: Who forgiveth all thine iniquities; who healeth all thy diseases..." ⁹³⁵ Therefore we see that the psalmist is clinging to God not only for protection from his enemies (114) and deliverance from them (118 and 119) but also for forgiveness (120). He knows that he is not yet a sinless creature and that every violation of God's commands, every failure to show due regard for His statutes is as if all the law were cast aside. He knows what James tells us: "For whosoever shall keep the whole law, and yet offend in one point, he is guilty of all. For he that said, 'Do not commit adultery', said also, 'Do not kill.' Now if thou commit no adultery, yet if thou kill, thou art become a transgressor of the law." ⁹³⁶ So the psalmist really does have a fear that goes beyond reverence. "My flesh trembleth for fear of thee" (120b) He is describing his fear of God's judgment. But, unlike the wicked who carelessly disregard God's laws and God's mercy, the psalmist does neither. The fact that he fears, again, tells us that he clings to God for forgiveness. But it is what this psalm does not say that is revealing. Nowhere is there any mention of sacrifice or formal temple worship, though the psalmist must have known and doubtless practiced both. The omission of any reference to them tells us that he clearly

⁹²⁹ Psalm 24:3

⁹³⁰ Psalm 130:3

⁹³¹ Malachi 3:2

⁹³² Hebrews 10:30 - 31

⁹³³ Hebrews 12:29

⁹³⁴ Psalm 130:3 - 4

⁹³⁵ Psalm 103:2 - 3

⁹³⁶ James 2:10 -11

understands that all such divinely appointed practice is a means only. His hope is placed in God, not the practices that God has ordained. It is God whom he trusts, not correct practice. In this the psalmist points forward to our spiritual estate. In many things we all offend the thrice holy God.⁹³⁷ But for the Christian we cling to the Person of God's only begotten Son, Jesus Christ, as our Savior. We trust in Him. His sacrifice of Himself on the cross is the means of our forgiveness, but He is our **ד** samach, our support, our Savior.

We may better understand us if we think of a man whose ship has sunk. He is doomed to drown. Given a great floating log that he may cling to, however, he will stay afloat and not die by drowning. If he clings to that log, he is saved, yet he still fears the awful consequences of letting go of it. He is safe only as he clings to the log. The ship sank in Eden, and mankind has been clinging to all sorts of things to survive, to live in God. The psalmist has chosen to cling to God himself. Neither temple (or church) membership nor attendance; neither "good works" done in the power of the flesh, nor any other thing which the heart of fallen man may conceive will do. For the psalmist, God is his Savior.⁹³⁸ For us, we know God through His Son. So that we may say with the Apostle Paul, "Wherefore, as by one man (*Adam*) sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned: ... as sin hath reigned unto death, even so might grace reign through righteousness unto eternal life by Jesus Christ our Lord."⁹³⁹

⁹³⁷ James 3:2 "For in many things we offend all. If any man offend not in word, the same is a perfect man, and able also to bridle the whole body." James, of course is speaking of the offenses that we give to men. But Paul's testimony that "all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God" (Romans 3:23) leaves no doubt that we all should have the same reverential respect for the Judge of all the earth and a fear of his righteous judgment.

⁹³⁸ 2 Samuel 22:3 The God of my rock; in him will I trust: he is ... my savior", Isaiah 43:3 "For I am the LORD thy God, the Holy One of Israel, thy Savior ...", Hosea 13:4 "Yet I am the LORD thy God ... there is no savior beside me." Luke 1:47 "And my spirit hath rejoiced in God my Savior."

⁹³⁹ Romans 5:12, 21

י (AIN)

☞ Prayer for Deliverance from the Proud ☞

¹²¹ I have done judgment and justice:
Leave me not to mine oppressors.
¹²² Be surety for thy servant for good:
Let not the proud oppress me.

☞ Prayer for Salvation and Instruction ☞

¹²³ Mine eyes fail for thy salvation,
And for the word of thy righteousness
¹²⁴ Deal with thy servant according unto thy mercy,
And teach me thy statutes.

☞ Prayer for Understanding God's Plan ☞

¹²⁵ I am thy servant; give me understanding,
That I may know thy testimonies
¹²⁶ It is time for thee, LORD, to work:
For they have made void thy law.

☞ Testimony of Love ☞

¹²⁷ Therefore I love thy commandments
Above gold; yea, above fine gold
¹²⁸ Therefore I esteem all thy precepts concerning all things to be right;
And I hate every false way.

☞

י – **Ain** means the eye or vision. The eye is the means by which we both learn and by which we move. What we do manually is governed mostly by sight. When we get old, without glasses that can compensate for our failing vision, frustration over our inability to do simple tasks for lack of vision increases, as does our weariness. This octave has three successive prayers concluded with a testament of devotion to God's commandments and testaments. In each prayer, the psalmist calls himself thy servant. This repetition helps us understand the octave's association with *ain* - the eye: "Behold, as the eyes of servants look unto the hand of their masters, and as the eyes of a maiden unto the hand of her mistress; so our eyes wait upon the LORD our God, until that he have mercy upon us."⁹⁴⁰ There are at least three modes of seeing: with the eyes, with the mind, and with the heart by faith. In this octave, the psalmist sees the obvious evils of his surroundings with his physical and mental eyes. He sees proud people who would oppress him (121b, 122b), as well as those who "have made void thy law" (126b). But there are things that his heart longs for and does not see but prays for: surety against his

⁹⁴⁰ Psalm 123:2

oppressors,⁹⁴¹ instruction in God's statutes (124b), and an understanding of God's testimonies (125). But, above all, he longs to see God take action on his behalf: "It is time for thee, LORD, to work" (126a). The psalmist makes clear that he has been looking for this for a long time because he tells God: "Mine eyes fail for thy salvation" (i.e. my spiritual eyes are weary with the effort of looking / waiting for thy salvation so that my physical eyes grow tired and I am close to spiritual fainting)⁹⁴² The psalmist knows by the eye of faith that God can satisfy these desires but he does not yet see them with the eyes of his body or his mind. But when we look at the word for salvation in Hebrew, we discover that the word itself points not to an abstract action, but to a person who is salvation: **ישועה** (pronounced Yesh-oo'-aw) is a name that means "he will save" in Hebrew. But **ישועה** is a contraction, in Aramaic, for a closely related name **יהושוע** (pronounced Yeh-ho-shoo'-ah). **יהושוע** - Yeh-ho-shoo'-ah is derived from **יהוה**-Y@hovah (the unpronounceable Tetragrammaton that we read as Jehovah) and **ישע** yasha' (pronounced yaw-shah') meaning to be free. Hence the name **יהושוע** - Yeh-ho-shoo'-ah means Jehovah-saves. The English form of **יהושוע** (Yeh-ho-shoo'-ah) is Joshua and its contracted Aramaic form **ישועה** - Yesh-oo'-aw in Greek is **Ἰησοῦς** which we anglicize as Jesus.⁹⁴³ This is why the angel, in giving our Lord's name to Joseph explained "thou shalt call his name JESUS: for he shall save his people from their sins."⁹⁴⁴ What the psalmist is saying, in effect, here is that his eyes grow weary waiting for his Savior, His master, Jesus.⁹⁴⁵

The contrast between physical/mental sight and faith's vision highlights the definition of faith in the Hebrews: "Now faith is a well-grounded assurance of that for which we hope, and a conviction of the reality of things which we do not see."⁹⁴⁶ It is not as if the psalmist has been inactive. He tells God, "I have done judgment and justice" (121a). But he seems to be saying, 'I have done as much as I know how to do and don't see how I can do any more.' But there is something more the psalmist can do and he does

⁹⁴¹ "A needy person will beseech someone with resources to pledge some of these to get a creditor off the debtor's back. "Oppression" often denotes extortion, so here the financial image is not far away. The suppliant is indeed like someone in financial straits at the hands of the willful (i.e. *the proud*) and needs YHWH to spend resources on this needy person's behalf. It is again as YHWH's servant that the suppliant makes the request; because of this relationship, an obligation hangs on the master." Goldingay *Psalms* Vol. 3 p. 427.

⁹⁴² This octave is marked by weariness and impatience. "Mine eyes fail for thy salvation and for the word of thy righteousness... It is time for thee, LORD, to work, for they have made void thy law." We saw this pattern of weariness and impatience of spirit in **כ** - caph, (the palm of the hand) that spoke of affliction (i.e. the chastening of the LORD). "Mine eyes fail for thy word, saying, When wilt thou comfort me?" (119:82) The sense in both cases is that the psalmist has been watching and waiting for God till his eyes are failing and he is starting to grow impatient, asking God when He will act, or telling Him "it is time, LORD." He is near to fainting spiritually but he still hopes in God. "My soul fainteth for thy salvation: but I hope in thy word." (119:81)

⁹⁴³ This explains why the reference to "Jesus" in Hebrews 4:8-9 does not refer to our Lord Jesus but to the Old Testament person of Joshua who led the people into the Promised Land. The writer to the Hebrews reasons thus: since David, who came after Joshua, spoke of a rest for the people of God in Psalm 95:7-11, he can infer that "if Jesus (i.e. *Joshua*) had given them rest, then would he (i.e. *David coming after Joshua*) not afterward have spoken of another day." Therefore there must remain a rest unto the people of God.

⁹⁴⁴ Matthew 1:20-21

⁹⁴⁵ It is interesting to note that the reference to **ישועה** - yesh-oo'-aw occurs four times in this psalm (123, 155, 166, and 174)

⁹⁴⁶ Hebrews 11:1 Weymouth's New Testament Translation

throughout this octave. Watching and waiting are part of the spiritual life of every believer. Delays in God's action are sometimes the result of the timing of His plans that are hidden from us. For Him the time is not right. For us the time seems too long already. Eyes may grow weary watching for an answer, while our spirits wait, longing for enlightenment! But watching is tied to prayer. Prayer is the one thing that we can do that can keep us from spiritual fainting. "Watch and pray that ye enter not into temptation" says our Lord Jesus in His hour of trial in Gethsemane.⁹⁴⁷ He also says this in regard to His return.⁹⁴⁸ All believers must wait for His return; they have no choice. But not all believers watch and pray as Jesus has commanded. Earnest prayer is a great defense against weariness and spiritual fainting. "I must tell Jesus all of my troubles. I cannot bear this burden alone" sings the hymn writer. But the psalmist's prayers are not unrelated in his mind. He is waiting not just for God but for a specific deliverance of God from oppression, for instruction in the statutes, and for understanding of God's testimonies (and timing). The unique complaint "Mine eyes fail for thy salvation," summarizes all the other prayers. In a sense, we may infer that 'salvation' is the psalmist's way of aggregating all of his longings. This allows us to equate (at least in part) exactly what 'salvation' means for the psalmist (and also for us). The psalmist can help us understand our salvation in these prayers.

A Prayer for Deliverance from the Proud: He pleads for surety and mercy. When we sin against God, we incur a debt to His justice.⁹⁴⁹ While mercy addresses that debt by forgiving it, justice must still be satisfied by someone standing surety against the debt. Debt forgiveness comes at a cost to someone. In the divine plan of salvation, it was Jesus.

A Prayer for Salvation and Instruction: Thy Salvation, and for the Word of Thy Righteousness: Salvation involves the person as well as the debt. Throughout this psalm, the psalmist's relationship with God has been central. As God is impeccably righteous, how can the sinful psalmist ever hope to sustain a relationship with Him? The linking of "thy salvation" and "thy righteousness" points to the New Testament doctrine of the imputation of Jesus' righteousness to us as the basis of our relationship with God. The psalmist's salvation does not rest upon his efforts; he cannot save himself. "In God is my salvation"⁹⁵⁰ What may not have been obvious to the psalmist lies in the word he uses for salvation. My eyes fail for thy **ישועה** (yesh-oo'-aw i.e. Jesus). Without realizing it, he is not waiting for a collection of desirable things from God, but for a person, Jesus Christ.⁹⁵¹ We are in the same situation today. The writer to the Hebrews tells us, "Thou

⁹⁴⁷ Matthew 26:41 'Watch and pray, that ye enter not into temptation: the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak.'

⁹⁴⁸ Mark 13:32, 33 "But of that day and that hour (i.e. the exact time of His return) knoweth no man, no, not the angels which are in heaven, neither the Son, but the Father. Take ye heed, watch and pray: for ye know not when the time is."

⁹⁴⁹ Luke 7:40 – 48 "There was a certain creditor which had two debtors: ... Her sins, which are many, are forgiven; for she loved much: but to whom little is forgiven, the same loveth little. And he said unto her, Thy sins are forgiven."

⁹⁵⁰ Psalm 62:7 In God is my salvation and my glory: the rock of my strength, and my refuge, is in God.

⁹⁵¹ When we look at the word the psalmist uses for salvation in Hebrew, we discover that the word itself points not to an abstract action, but to a person who is salvation: **ישועה** (pronounced Yesh-oo'-aw) is a name that means "he will save" in Hebrew. But **ישועה**

hast put all things in subjection under his feet. For in that he put all in subjection under him, he left nothing that is not put under him. But now we see not yet all things put under him. But we see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels for the suffering of death, crowned with glory and honor; that he by the grace of God should taste death for every man.”⁹⁵²

According to Thy Mercy, Teach me Thy Statutes: While our relationship with God is established by the extension of His mercy to us because of Jesus’ standing surety for our moral debts and by freely imputing Jesus’ righteousness to us as a gift; the evidence of that relationship is an ongoing process: a life of obedience in response to His instruction and guidance. “There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit.”⁹⁵³ Our first and ongoing response to God is repentance and faith.⁹⁵⁴ We need His teaching and guidance as well as His mercy and His righteousness. The evidence of this work of God in the soul is its effect upon our thought, will and emotions. ‘I love thy commandments above gold; yea, above fine gold. I esteem all thy precepts concerning all things to be right; and I hate every false way.’

A prayer for understanding God’s plan: The psalmist is impatient with God’s timing. “It is time for thee, LORD, to work” because the proud, who oppress him, “have made void thy law.” (126) In an age of spiritual declension, the seeming inactivity of God, is a very severe trial. Earnest prayer is the only way to avoid spiritual fainting and lost rewards. If God will not destroy the wicked, then the psalmist would like to know why He delays. He does not ask for instruction in statutes or commands but for “understanding that I may know thy testimonies.” He wants God to tell him (to testify) what is going on. “Why?” is often the first question we ask in suffering. Even our Lord

is a contraction, in Aramaic, for a closely related name יהושוע (pronounced Yeh-ho-shoo'-ah). יהושוע - Yeh-ho-shoo'-ah is derived from יהוה-Y@hovah (the unpronounceable Tetragrammaton that we read as Jehovah) and ישע yasha` (pronounced yaw-shah') meaning to be free. Hence the name יהושוע - Yeh-ho-shoo'-ah means Jehovah-saves. The English form of יהושוע (Yeh-ho-shoo'-ah) is Joshua and its contracted Aramaic form ישועה - Yesh-oo'-aw in Greek is Ἰησοῦς which we anglicize as Jesus. This explains why the reference to “Jesus” in Hebrews 4:8-9 does not refer to our Lord Jesus but to the Old Testament person of Joshua who led the people into the Promised Land. The writer to the Hebrews reasons thus: since David, who came after Joshua, spoke of a rest for the people of God in Psalm 95:7-11, he can infer that “if Jesus (*i.e. Joshua*) had given them rest, then would he (*i.e. David coming after Joshua*) not afterward have spoken of another day.” Therefore there must remain a rest unto the people of God. The angel, in giving our Lord’s name to Joseph explained “thou shalt call his name JESUS: for he shall save his people from their sins.” (Matthew 1:20-21) What the psalmist is saying, in effect, here is that his eyes grow weary waiting for his Savior, His master, Jesus. It is interesting to note that the reference to ישועה - yesh-oo'-aw occurs four times in this psalm (123, 155, 166, and 174)

⁹⁵² Hebrews 2:8-9

⁹⁵³ Romans 8:1 There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit. For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus hath made me free from the law of sin and death. For what the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh, God sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh: That the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit.

⁹⁵⁴ Colossians 2:6 “As ye have therefore received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk ye in him.”

Jesus asked it.⁹⁵⁵ But God is not bound to explain His actions. Rather, it is for us to suffer patiently. The psalmist lives in an age of spiritual declension and that coupled with the seeming inactivity of God is a very severe trial for him. Earnest prayer is his only way to avoid spiritual fainting and lost rewards. As the Apostle Paul tells the Galatians, "Let us not be weary in well doing: for in due season we shall reap, if we faint not. As we have therefore opportunity, let us do good unto all men, especially unto them who are of the household of faith."⁹⁵⁶ Prayer is central to such an approach to life and that is a lesson we do well to emulate.

A Testimony of Love: Despite his eyes failing as he waits for God's Yeshua and despite his impatience in an age in which the proud oppress him and make void God's law, still the psalmist, as the LORD's servant, demonstrates his love for his Master: "I love thy commandments above gold; yea, above fine gold. ... I esteem all thy precepts concerning all things to be right; and I hate every false way."

Looking Unto God

- ¹²¹ I have done judgment and justice:
 Leave me not to mine oppressors.
¹²² Be surety for thy servant for good:
 Let not the proud oppress me.



As noted in the overview, ע means the eye. It may be ironic to a modern American reader that the psalmist begins with the assertion "I have done judgment and justice" since the modern figure of justice is normally shown blindfolded holding a scale in balance. The reason justice is shown blindfolded is to emphasize that all people are entitled to justice under the law without partiality to the individual. In Biblical terms this is akin to the assertion that God is no respecter of persons.⁹⁵⁷ But the ironic contrast does raise the question of what we do and do not see. Vision is profoundly important to all our lives. Much of what we do is totally dependent on our ability to see. In scriptural terms there are at least three modes of seeing, with the eyes, with the mind, and with the heart by faith. Most importantly, however, the eye is also taken as a symbol of faith. We walk, says the apostle, by faith not by sight.⁹⁵⁸ The notion that faith is a kind of vision which involves not a physical eye but a spiritual one, prompts us to ask two

⁹⁵⁵ Psalm 22:1 "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me? Why art thou so far from helping me, and from the words of my roaring?"

⁹⁵⁶ Galatians 6:9 - 10

⁹⁵⁷ Romans 2:5-6,11 But after thy hardness and impenitent heart treasurest up unto thyself wrath against the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God; Who will render to every man according to his deeds:...For there is no respect of persons with God.

⁹⁵⁸ 2 Corinthians 5:7 (For we walk by faith, not by sight:)

fundamentally different questions about the use of the psalmist's "eye" in this octave. What does the Psalmist see? And what is the Psalmist looking for?

What does the psalmist see? In a word, he sees the proud who would oppress him. Even though he has done judgment and justice (121a), he sees that the balance of power lies on their side. He tells God, in effect, that if He leaves the psalmist to his own devices, it will not be enough. In this octave, the psalmist continues to remind God (and us) that he is God's servant (122b, 124a, 125a) and that he is living in an imperfect world. We see something of what the psalmist must have seen when he spoke of the wicked in psalm 73.

*Truly God is good to Israel,
Even to such as are of a clean heart.
But as for me, my feet were almost gone
My steps had well nigh slipped.
For I was envious at the foolish,
When I saw the prosperity of the wicked.*

In that psalm the wicked are described as strong, not plagued by trouble, proud, violent, having more than heart could wish, corrupt, speaking wickedly (i.e. approvingly) of oppression, speaking against the very governance of God. It would appear that the law of God would have the effect of limiting both the acquisition of excessive wealth and the very desire for it. ("Thou shalt not covet") But in making "void thy law" the oppressors choose to make the acquisition of wealth the chief end of their existence, rather than doing "judgment and justice." Evidently, they were successful. With great wealth they gained great power and the ability to both scorn those who struggle in poverty and to oppress them through economic strength.

What is the psalmist looking for? It is this latter question that links this octave with the previous one. Here we consider what the psalmist looks for by the eye of faith. In the previous octave the psalmist spoke of clinging to God as his D samach, his support.⁹⁵⁹ In this octave we see how he clings to God as his support with the eye of faith.

*"Unto thee lift I up mine eyes,
O thou that dwellest in the heavens.
Behold, as the eyes of servants look unto the hand of their masters,
And as the eyes of a maiden unto the hand of her mistress;
So our eyes wait upon the LORD our God,
Until that he have mercy upon us.
Have mercy upon us, O LORD, have mercy upon us:
For we are exceedingly filled with contempt.*

⁹⁵⁹ Verse 116a "Uphold me according unto thy word, that I may live" and verse 117 "Hold thou me up, and I shall be safe."

*Our soul is exceedingly filled
With the scorning of those that are at ease,
And with the contempt of the proud.*"⁹⁶⁰

This octave is marked by three interrelated prayers. Verses 121b and 122 present the first prayer. It is a plea for deliverance from the wealthy proud. He pleads "Leave me not to mine oppressors. ... Let not the proud oppress me." He likens his vulnerability to that of a poor man who stands in debt to the wealthy who exploit his economic vulnerability to oppress him. He makes the further, bold request (122a) that God would "be surety (an economic and legal term) for thy servant for good" i.e. that God would deal out of His infinite wealth of power for the good outcome of his servant in the conflict between one who loves God's commandments (127) and those who make void thy law (126b). Of course, the proud oppressor fails to realize:

*"Trust not in oppression,
And become not vain in robbery:
If riches increase,
Set not your heart upon them.
God hath spoken once; twice have I heard this;
That power belongeth unto God.
Also unto thee, O Lord, belongeth mercy:
For thou renderest to every man according to his work"*⁹⁶¹

The proud oppressor chooses to ignore the reality that the acquisition of wealth is one of the most serious of spiritual trials, and that they are failing it! "Thou sayest, I am rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing; and knowest not that thou art wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked."⁹⁶² No wonder Jesus, in His admonitions, warned:

"Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth, where moth and rust doth corrupt, and where thieves break through and steal: But lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through nor steal: For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also. ... Therefore take no thought, saying, what shall we eat? Or what shall we drink? Or Wherewithal shall we be clothed? (For after all these things do the Gentiles seek.) For your heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of all these things. But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you."

⁹⁶³

⁹⁶⁰ Psalm 123

⁹⁶¹ Psalm 62:10 - 12

⁹⁶² Revelation 3:17

⁹⁶³ Matthew 6:19 - 21, 31 - 33

Endurance

¹²³ Mine eyes fail for thy salvation,
And for the word of thy righteousness.



These lines echo the earlier lines of verse 81-82.

⁸¹ My soul fainteth for thy salvation:
but I hope in thy word.
⁸² Mine eyes fail for thy word, saying,
When wilt thou comfort me?

There the open hand of God, כ (Caph), was teaching by chastening and comforting. Here it is time that God uses as His instrument of instruction. Besides the obvious role that the eye of faith plays in the spiritual life, this octave confronts us with valuable lessons that time can teach us. "It is time for thee, LORD, to work."⁹⁶⁴ Verse 123 looks ahead to this latter assertion and underscores the urgency of the psalmist's plea for God to act. God might ask the psalmist, 'Why is it time for me to work?' The answer the psalmist gives is that I have been watching so long "for thy salvation and for the word of thy righteousness" that "mine eyes fail." Actually, the psalmist is watching for several things that this octave makes mention of: surety, salvation, the Word of God's righteousness, mercy, instruction in His statutes, understanding and the knowledge of His testimonies. And for each of these he prays. But the overarching thing that the psalmist is looking for is that God would act on his behalf. This pressing reason is what lies in the little word "fail." The word translated fail is כלה (pronounced kaw-law') a primitive root meaning to end, in this case to cease, to be finished, to perish. The delay of God (for whatever reason) has brought the psalmist to a fresh understanding of his human limitations, specifically of his ability to see with the eye of faith. His faith is failing and his hope is evaporating. He has been hoping in God for a very long time while those who would oppress him "have made void thy law." Here, as in the previous two verses, there is a great hiatus between what he sees (the prosperous but wicked oppressor) and what he hopes to see (God taking action against them). In this second prayer of the octave, he prays urgently for two things: salvation and for the word of thy righteousness. Why has he come to this urgent awareness? What has the time of God's apparent inactivity taught him?

Very often when individuals are confronted with a situation that is unacceptable, they begin the process of "fixing" it. They take action calculated to change the dynamics of the painful relationship. Their action may include revolt as the oppressed rises up against his oppressor. It may involve separation as the individual seeks freedom to be

⁹⁶⁴ Psalm 119: 126a

who they want to be and not what another tells them they have to be. They may seek to right the relationship according to how they feel it should be defined. The descriptive pattern of words about the relationship is of their utterance. But here, the psalmist is not telling God how he wants the relationship to be 'righted'. He is waiting for "the word of **thy** righteousness." As noted before, while holiness describes character, righteousness describes relationships. The law is given to provide norms for right relationships. But these have made void thy law and the psalmist realizes that there is nothing he can do about it. He cannot right the relationship between himself and his oppressors. He is constrained to wait on God for the word of thy righteousness, i.e. the word from God that will right the relationship between him and others. As for him, he pleads that he has done what was within his power to do: "I have done judgment and justice" but "they have made void thy law." The psalmist knows better than to venture into the world of manipulation. He may want his oppressors to behave differently, but he knows that their behavior is the outgrowth of their hearts disposition and that he cannot change the hearts of others. He knows what many fail to recognize: if human behavior is to change and relationships become right(eous), then it must be the word of God that establishes that rightness: "the word of thy righteousness". Only God's word can transform hearts that are willing to receive it. And those who reject His word find in that same word their judgment.⁹⁶⁵ So he takes no action because he knows that no remedial action (apart from those in his own life) can be taken by him in regards to others. Verse 123b modifies and amplifies what the psalmist means by the word "salvation" in 123a. In 123a, he seeks salvation but 123b helps us understand that that salvation he seeks is not just about his relationship with God but also his relationship with his adversaries. In that sense, salvation can mean either peace with his former but repentant adversaries or freedom from unrepentant adversaries who have been removed by God.

There are two lessons nascent in this verse. First, the psalmist's inability to establish right relationships with people who have made the heart decision to say 'no' to God and to live in opposition to Him (and His servants). He cannot change their hearts. The second is the limits of his faith. His eye of faith is failing him as he awaits God to take action. Why then does God thus strain the spiritual eye of His servant? The apostle Peter makes this very clear.

"Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, which according to his abundant mercy hath begotten us again unto a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in

⁹⁶⁵ John 12:46 – 48 (Jesus says) "I am come a light into the world, that whosoever believeth on me should not abide in darkness. And if any man hear my words, and believe not, I judge him not: for I came not to judge the world, but to save the world. He that rejecteth me, and receiveth not my words, hath one that judgeth him: the word that I have spoken, the same shall judge him in the last day."

heaven for you, who are kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation ready to be revealed in the last time. Wherein ye greatly rejoice, though now for a season, if need be, ye are in heaviness through manifold temptations: That the trial of your faith, being much more precious than of gold that perisheth, though it be tried with fire, might be found unto praise and honor and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ”⁹⁶⁶

God is not here in the business of causing the spiritual eye of the psalmist to fail, as he protests. Rather God is strengthening it. Untried, faith will not grow. But the trial of the psalmist’s faith will be “found unto praise and honor and glory” at the appearance of “thy salvation” (ישועה) ~ pronounced yesh-oo'-aw) - thy Jesus, Who is for us the Word of Thy righteousness.

Enlightenment

¹²⁰ My flesh trembleth for fear of thee;
And I am afraid of thy judgments.

...

¹²³ Mine eyes fail for thy salvation,
And for the word of thy righteousness.

¹²⁴ Deal with thy servant according unto thy mercy,
And teach me thy statutes.



If the word of God alone can transform the hearts of the wicked oppressor (or remove them altogether) and provide that salvation, for the sight of which, the psalmist’s eyes are failing; the word of God alone can also enlighten the failing eyes of the psalmist to His statutes. The psalmist knows that the painful relationship with his oppressors is only part of his concern. Being delivered from painful relationships with evil folks around him or having those relationships set right through repentance still will not satisfy him fully. He returns to his relationship with the LORD as evidenced by his desire not just for salvation (123) but that the LORD would express His mercy or loving kindness to him by teaching him His statutes (124). But what has this verse to do with עין - the eye?

The psalmist’s interest (and ours as well) is not with the legal enactments of God as ends in themselves. Laws are, after all, things to guide our lives, but they are not life itself. They may help direct our efforts in ways that God in His beneficence would encourage us to go for our felicity. But they do not tell us what it means to live. God alone is the end of all things.⁹⁶⁷ The statutes tell us something of how the foundational

⁹⁶⁶ 1 Peter 1:3 - 7

⁹⁶⁷ Revelation 1:8 “I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the ending, saith the Lord, which is, and which was, and which is to come, the Almighty.”

commandments of God play out in daily life. They reveal the inner meanings of God's great commandments. It is axiomatic, however, that the law cannot deal with the fundamental problem of our sin nature,⁹⁶⁸ nor reestablish a right relationship with God.⁹⁶⁹ But the statutes do reveal something quite wonderful. They tell us something about God, Himself. They 'open our eyes' to His character; how He would act in the daily vicissitudes of life. When our eyes are thus 'opened', we see not only God but ourselves and everything else in a different light as well. Enlightenment opens new paths of action for us and reveals opportunities awaiting us where before we saw only dead ends and bleak prospects. For the believer, the pursuit of those new paths and the apprehension of awaiting opportunities are both the work of God's grace, of which His mercy is a primary manifestation. When the psalmist says "deal with thy servant according unto thy mercy, and teach me thy statutes", he is not appealing to the intrinsic power of the statutes to deliver him from sin (they have none), nor from God's judgment, the thought of which makes him tremble (120). Rather, he is appealing to the grace of God⁹⁷⁰ that would both enlighten and enable him to live according to God's laws.

But there is an affective component as well as cognitive and volitional components to the answer of this prayer. When we see things differently, we feel differently about painful situations and hurtful people. The psalmist's longing eyes are failing because he has been searching for a salvation that makes sense within the scope of his perception. But enlightenment as to the statutes (and God's character and plan) will change his field of view, and may redefine the salvation for which he has been seeking. We have a

⁹⁶⁸ Romans 7:12 – 23; 8:3 – 4 "Wherefore the law is holy, and the commandment holy, and just, and good. Was then that which is good made death unto me? God forbid. But sin, that it might appear sin, working death in me by that which is good (*i.e. the law*); that sin by the commandment might become exceeding sinful. (*i.e. that the law in explaining what is good also reveals the nature of sin more clearly*)

For we know that the law is spiritual: but I am carnal, sold under sin. For that which I do, I allow not: for what I would, that do I not; but what I hate, that do I. If then I do that which I would not, I consent unto the law that it is good. Now then it is no more I that do it, but sin that dwelleth in me. For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh,) dwelleth no good thing: for to will is present with me; but how to perform that which is good I find not. For the good that I would I do not: but the evil which I would not, that I do. Now if I do that I would not, it is no more I that do it, but sin that dwelleth in me. I find then a law, that, when I would do good, evil is present with me. For I delight in the law of God after the inward man: But I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members. ... For what the law could not do, (*i.e. the law can reveal the sin nature, but it cannot cure it*) in that it was weak through the flesh, God sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh: that the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit."

⁹⁶⁹ Galatians 2:16, 3:10 - 14 "Knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law, but by the faith of Jesus Christ, even we have believed in Jesus Christ, that we might be justified by the faith of Christ, and not by the works of the law: for by the works of the law shall no flesh be justified. ... For as many as are of the works of the law are under the curse: for it is written, Cursed is every one that continueth not in all things which are written in the book of the law to do them. But that no man is justified by the law in the sight of God, it is evident: for, 'the just shall live by faith.' And the law is not of faith: but, the man that doeth them shall live in them. Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us: for it is written, Cursed is every one that hangeth on a tree: That the blessing of Abraham might come on the Gentiles through Jesus Christ; that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith."

⁹⁷⁰ The word translated mercy is רַחֲמִים *cheded*, (pronounced *kheh'-sed*) from a primitive root that means to bow the neck in kindness to be kind hence, רַחֲמִים means by implication (towards God) piety and (towards man) favor, loving-kindness, mercy, or pity.

simple illustration of this in the life of Elisha and his servant.⁹⁷¹ When confronted with an encircling Syrian army, Elisha's servant feared for their lives, but Elisha was not troubled. In response to the servant's plea for salvation, Elisha prayed "Lord, open his eyes that he may see." And the servant beheld for the first time the far vaster host of heaven. How his affective state must have changed in an instant! And with that change, salvation (albeit in a form not expected) was quick to follow. That seems to be the correlation here. Verses 123 and 124 are not separate but linked on the deeper level of salvation being right relationship with God, Himself.

Understanding God

¹²⁴ Deal with thy servant according unto thy mercy,
And teach me thy statutes.

¹²⁵ I am thy servant; give me understanding,
That I may know thy testimonies.



As we move from God's great commandments to His statutes, the focus of attention constantly narrows until we come finally to the individual judgments of God and the explanations that He gives that surround those specific determinations – "thy testimonies." It is like 'drilling down' from the very general to the very specific. And it is at this level of specificity that we live our daily lives. It is here that we have our little victories and experience our little defeats. It is here that our service to God will please or displease, for God takes note of the little things of our life and how we act in them: the fifth sparrow, the widow's mite, the cup of cold water given in the name of a

⁹⁷¹ 2 Kings 6:8 - 23 "Then the king of Syria warred against Israel, and took counsel with his servants, saying, In such and such a place shall be my camp. And the man of God sent unto the king of Israel, saying, Beware that thou pass not such a place; for thither the Syrians are come down. And the king of Israel sent to the place which the man of God told him and warned him of, and saved himself there, not once nor twice. Therefore the heart of the king of Syria was sore troubled for this thing; and he called his servants, and said unto them, Will ye not shew me which of us is for the king of Israel? And one of his servants said, None, my lord, O king: but Elisha, the prophet that is in Israel, telleth the king of Israel the words that thou speakest in thy bedchamber.

And he said, Go and spy where he is, that I may send and fetch him. And it was told him, saying, Behold, he is in Dothan. Therefore sent he thither horses, and chariots, and a great host: and they came by night, and compassed the city about. And when the servant of the man of God was risen early, and gone forth, behold, an host compassed the city both with horses and chariots. And his servant said unto him, Alas, my master! How shall we do? And he answered, Fear not: for they that be with us are more than they that be with them. **And Elisha prayed, and said, LORD, I pray thee, open his eyes, that he may see.** And the LORD opened the eyes of the young man; and he saw: and, behold, the mountain was full of horses and chariots of fire round about Elisha. And when they came down to him, **Elisha prayed unto the LORD, and said, Smite this people, I pray thee, with blindness.** And he smote them with blindness according to the word of Elisha. And Elisha said unto them, This is not the way, neither is this the city: follow me, and I will bring you to the man whom ye seek. But he led them to Samaria. And it came to pass, when they were come into Samaria, that **Elisha said, LORD, open the eyes of these men, that they may see.** And the LORD opened their eyes, and they saw; and, behold, they were in the midst of Samaria. And the king of Israel said unto Elisha, when he saw them, My father, shall I smite them? shall I smite them? And he answered, Thou shalt not smite them: wouldest thou smite those whom thou hast taken captive with thy sword and with thy bow? Set bread and water before them, that they may eat and drink, and go to their master. And he prepared great provision for them: and when they had eaten and drunk, he sent them away, and they went to their master. So the bands of Syria came no more into the land of Israel.

disciple, the very hairs of our head.⁹⁷² It is in the little things that fidelity is demonstrated. "He that is faithful in that which is least is faithful also in much: and he that is unjust in the least is unjust also in much."⁹⁷³ He observes the attitude of His servants in the smallness of the everyday. "But whoso shall offend one of these little ones which believe in me, it were better for him that a millstone were hanged about his neck, and that he were drowned in the depth of the sea. ... Take heed that ye despise not one of these little ones; for I say unto you, that in heaven their angels do always behold the face of my Father which is in heaven."⁹⁷⁴

But what is God looking for? At least we can say that one who proclaims himself to be God's servant (as the psalmist does three times in this octave) should mirror something of the character of God in their everyday life. And to do that the individual must not just understand the generalities of God's will for human behavior (the law) but God's character as revealed in what He has to say about specific situations. It is always in specifics that human character (like fidelity or humility or graciousness) is revealed. While the psalmist pleads to be taught "thy statutes," it is only a step along the way to understanding "thy testimonies". There is, of course no conflict in the psalmist's requests for knowledge, wisdom, and understanding of any of God's laws, because there is no dichotomy between any of God's utterances. God is One and therefore His commandments, statutes, testimonies, and judgments must of necessity be coherent. But that is what makes understanding them (and in a wider sense understanding the character of God) so interesting and challenging. We do not always understand how the guidance of the more general and universally applicable plays into the specifics of our daily life. In our age, as believers in Jesus, we typically ask ourselves "what would Jesus do" (i.e. in this situation). But here the psalmist is not asking what God would do. Rather he is asking to understand why God would do something. He wants to understand and achieve heart knowledge of how God sees a particular situation and why. He pleads this because he knows that his service cannot be just a mechanical obedience to laws of which he has no real grasp. It must be an interior integration of awareness, attitudes and values that when expressed in action reveal the character of God in the little things that the psalmist is called to do. In short real service is not found in mechanical action, no matter how correct, but in heart attitudes that express the

⁹⁷² Matthew 10:29-30 "Are not two sparrows sold for a farthing? And one of them shall not fall on the ground without your Father. But the very hairs of your head are all numbered." Mark 12:42 - 44 "And there came a certain poor widow, and she threw in two mites, which make a farthing. And he called unto him his disciples, and saith unto them, Verily I say unto you, That this poor widow hath cast more in, than all they which have cast into the treasury: For all they did cast in of their abundance; but she of her want did cast in all that she had, even all her living." Matthew 10:42 "And whosoever shall give to drink unto one of these little ones a cup of cold water only in the name of a disciple, verily I say unto you, he shall in no wise lose his reward."

⁹⁷³ Luke 16:10

⁹⁷⁴ Matthew 18:6, 10 "their angels do always behold the face of my Father which is in heaven" *i.e.* their guardian angels are always personally accountable to my Father in heaven for fulfilling the responsibility of their ministry on the little ones' behalf. If God so holds the angels accountable, how much more will He hold you accountable if you cause one of His little ones to stumble because you have despised them as being worthless.

servant's devotion to his Master. And this devotion is also expressed in the desire to better understand the One whom he serves. He pleads for discernment of God's character and will in specific situations based on a divinely imparted acquaintance with His testimonies.

Ultimately, though, service does involve actions, and actions are the result of decisions or judgments founded upon what God has said both about what is right (commandments and statutes) and the particulars of a given situation (testimonies). Given the knowledge of the former and the understanding of the later, the servant must then make a judgment about particular courses of action in accordance with his master's will. In so doing, he acts as his master's surrogate. By making the pleas he does, the psalmist is not asking God to make the critical decisions for him but to guide him to the point where he can make those decisions on his own, but in much the same way that God would make them. He is not an automaton. Automatons have no responsibility for their actions, servants do. That is also why he says "My flesh trembleth for fear of thee; and I am afraid of thy judgments." That is, if he should misjudge and go in a direction antithetical to God, then the judgment of God would be against him. It would mean God's displeasure with his service. His role as God's servant is vouchsafed, however, by his ongoing devotion to God expressed by his awe of Him and desire to know Him better. In the parable of the servants, Jesus speaks of faithful and lazy servants.⁹⁷⁵ The Master's joy in the righteous rests upon their fidelity in little obediences. The wicked and slothful servant also has a fear of God. "Then he (the wicked and slothful servant) which had received the one talent came and said, Lord, I knew thee that thou art an hard man, reaping where thou hast not sown, and gathering where thou hast not strawed: And I was afraid, and went and hid thy talent in the earth: lo, there thou hast that is thine." But his fear was founded on a false knowledge of God as a hard taskmaster with a tendency to unjust dealings. Even this fallacious knowledge, however, should have prompted sound action. "Thou wicked and slothful servant," answers the master, "thou knewest that I reap where I sowed not, and gather where I have not strawed: Thou oughtest therefore to have put my money to the exchangers, and then at my coming I should have received mine own with usury." The difference here lies not in fear but in lack of devotion. The wicked servant knows about God but the faithful servant actually knows God personally as a compassionate teacher and life guide. Fidelity for him was an expression of love. The wicked steward

⁹⁷⁵ Matthew 25:22 - 28 He also that had received two talents came and said, Lord, thou deliveredst unto me two talents: behold, I have gained two other talents beside them. His lord said unto him, Well done, good and faithful servant; thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things: enter thou into the joy of thy lord. Then he which had received the one talent came and said, Lord, I knew thee that thou art an hard man, reaping where thou hast not sown, and gathering where thou hast not strawed: And I was afraid, and went and hid thy talent in the earth: lo, there thou hast that is thine. His lord answered and said unto him, Thou wicked and slothful servant, thou knewest that I reap where I sowed not, and gather where I have not strawed: Thou oughtest therefore to have put my money to the exchangers, and then at my coming I should have received mine own with usury. Take therefore the talent from him, and give it unto him which hath ten talents.

used his external knowledge about God as an excuse. But if he had carefully sought God, he would have found such knowledge was worthless and self-condemning. His fear produced exactly what he feared, not because God is hard and unjust, but because he was lazy and basically loved his ease more than his God. The psalmist was neither. He pleaded with God for personal, relational knowledge and understanding of God so that he would be better able to serve Him.

“We see not yet...”

^{123a} Mine eyes fail for thy salvation,

...

¹²⁶ It is time for thee, LORD, to work:

For they have made void thy law.

¹²⁷ Therefore I love thy commandments above gold;

Yea, above fine gold.

¹²⁸ Therefore I esteem all thy precepts concerning all things to be right;

And I hate every false way.



We come now to the verse which really sets the urgent tone for the prayers of this octave. Prayer rests on the belief that God invites prayer and hears it favorably.⁹⁷⁶ But the urgency of our prayer is frequently based on the difficulty of our external situation. The more difficult and painful the situation, the more fervent the prayer will be. Of Jesus, Luke testifies, “And being in an agony he prayed more earnestly: and his sweat was as it were great drops of blood falling down to the ground.”⁹⁷⁷ We also have the confidence that “The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much.”⁹⁷⁸ Effectual prayer is a confession of our insufficiency.⁹⁷⁹ The psalmist finds himself in a painful straight. He has “done judgment and justice” (121a) but those who would oppress him “have made void thy law.” He has seen their nefarious plots regarding him and has been watching for “thy salvation” for some time but as yet faith has not given way to sight. So, the psalmist cries out in an urgency borne of desperation “It is time for thee, LORD, to work.”

Again, ׀, ain (the eye) gives us a clue to understanding the dynamics of this verse. The psalmist constantly sees iniquity at work and has been looking for God’s salvation for some time, but he has not seen God moving to answer his prayer. But does he see

⁹⁷⁶ Hebrews 11:6 “But without faith it is impossible to please him: for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him.”

⁹⁷⁷ Luke 22:44

⁹⁷⁸ James 5:16 Confess your faults one to another, and pray one for another, that ye may be healed. The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much.

⁹⁷⁹ 2 Corinthians 3:4 – 5 “... And such trust have we through Christ to God-ward: not that we are sufficient of ourselves to think any thing as of ourselves; but our sufficiency is of God...”

everything? Is God really inactive? Here we are confronted with the trial of faith. Often the dichotomy of what is apparent and what is really so continues for an indefinite (and often distressingly painful) period of time. In such a situation, the real trial of faith is not to let go of it, not to cease believing that God really does hear our plea⁹⁸⁰ and that He is active according to His good pleasure and His thoughts toward us.⁹⁸¹ The psalmist does not see (and often we do not see) what God's purposes are, what He is doing in the present moment and what His timing is as He accomplishes those good ends. The psalmist has prayed that God would teach him His statutes and give him understanding of His testimonies, that God would not leave him to those who would oppress him. But he has not asked to see God's purposes or His timing. Here we must reflect on God's governance, God's "work."

There is a mystery about the governance of God. All around we see the world sunk in sin and violence, selfishness and injustice, but we do not see the hand of God at work. The psalmist's cry in this verse "It is time for thee, LORD, to work, for they have made void thy law" is really the heart cry of every believing and righteous soul of every sinful age in every place that has ever seen the folly of mankind. God seems inactive, asleep, even absent! But is He? Jesus assures us that "My Father worketh hitherto, and I work."⁹⁸² The work referred to in the widest sense is the work of God's eternal governance over all His creation. Nor should we think for a moment that His ongoing governance has in any way been suspended despite what our physical eyes tell us. The writer to the Hebrews sums up this apparent dichotomy between appearance (what we see with our physical and mental eyes) and reality (what we see by the eye of faith):

"But one in a certain place⁹⁸³ testified, saying, 'What is man, that thou art mindful of him? Or the son of man, that thou visitest him? Thou madest him a little lower than the angels; thou crownedst him with glory and honor, and didst set him over the works of thy hands:

⁹⁸⁰ After four hundred years of bondage in Egypt, God says to Moses: "And the LORD said, I have surely seen the affliction of my people which are in Egypt, and have heard their cry by reason of their taskmasters; for I know their sorrows; and I am come down to deliver them out of the hand of the Egyptians, and to bring them up out of that land unto a good land and a large, unto a land flowing with milk and honey; unto the place of the Canaanites, and the Hittites, and the Amorites, and the Perizzites, and the Hivites, and the Jebusites. Now therefore, behold, the cry of the children of Israel is come unto me: and I have also seen the oppression wherewith the Egyptians oppress them." Exodus 3:7 - 9

⁹⁸¹ When God makes mention of His thoughts toward a sinful Israel, one gains an insight of how long the accomplishment of God's intended good for us may be deferred. "For thus saith the LORD, that after seventy years be accomplished at Babylon I will visit you, and perform my good word toward you, in causing you to return to this place. For I know the thoughts that I think toward you, saith the LORD, thoughts of peace, and not of evil, to give you an expected end. Then shall ye call upon me, and ye shall go and pray unto me, and I will hearken unto you. And ye shall seek me, and find me, when ye shall search for me with all your heart. And I will be found of you, saith the LORD: and I will turn away your captivity, and I will gather you from all the nations, and from all the places whither I have driven you, saith the LORD; and I will bring you again into the place whence I caused you to be carried away captive." Jeremiah 29:10 - 14

⁹⁸² John 5:16 - 18 "And therefore did the Jews persecute Jesus, and sought to slay him, because he had done these things on the Sabbath day. But Jesus answered them, 'My Father worketh hitherto, and I work.' Therefore the Jews sought the more to kill him, because he not only had broken the Sabbath, but said also that God was his Father, making himself equal with God."

⁹⁸³ "This one is David; and the certain place, Psalm 8:4-6. But why does the apostle use this indeterminate mode of quotation? Because it was common thus to express the testimony of any of the inspired writers; **כתב אמר הויה** (amar hahu kethab), thus saith a certain scripture."

- Adam Clark's Commentary on Hebrews 2:6

Thou hast put all things in subjection under his feet.' For in that he put all in subjection under him, he left nothing that is not put under him. But now we see not yet all things put under him. But we see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels for the suffering of death, crowned with glory and honor; that he by the grace of God should taste death for every man." ⁹⁸⁴

The phrase "Thou madest him a little lower than the angels; thou crownedst him with glory and honor, and didst set him over the works of thy hands" refers back to the time of the creation when God made man in His image and gave him "dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth"⁹⁸⁵ An aspect of being made in the "image of God" is that man was made an instrument of God's governance of the earth. But, as is the case with any steward, man had to be given the liberty to make decisions as God's appointed surrogate. To support that service, God gave him laws so that man's governance might be a 'rule of law' (as we say today) – God's law. But man's governance over all the earth, particularly every creeping thing that creepeth on the earth, was challenged very cleverly by one of them, for "the serpent was more subtle than any beast of the field which the LORD God had made."⁹⁸⁶ Man, made in God's image, made to be governed by and to govern by God's law, chose instead to be governed by concupiscence, that ancient concupiscence that said "I will be like the most High."⁹⁸⁷ Human governance departed from the Divine governance that day and has never aligned since. Nor could it align because of the irreversible damage of the spiritual fall of those first made in God's image. What then shall God do? Did He not foresee this? Certainly, He saw it all before ever He created human kind, He also foresaw all those who would ultimately show forth "the exceeding riches of his grace in his kindness toward us through Christ Jesus," ⁹⁸⁸ that same Jesus of whom the writer to the Hebrews says "Thou madest him a little lower than the angels; thou crownedst him with glory and honor, and didst set him over the works of thy hands." The reference in Psalm 8:4-6, quoted here in the passage in Hebrews is a double *entente* referring not just

⁹⁸⁴ Hebrews 2:6 - 9

⁹⁸⁵ Genesis 1:26 "And God said, 'Let us make man in our image, after our likeness: and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth.'"

⁹⁸⁶ Genesis 3:1a

⁹⁸⁷ Isaiah 14:12 -14 "How art thou fallen from heaven, O Lucifer, son of the morning! how art thou cut down to the ground, which didst weaken the nations! For thou hast said in thine heart, I will ascend into heaven, I will exalt my throne above the stars of God: I will sit also upon the mount of the congregation, in the sides of the north: I will ascend above the heights of the clouds; I will be like the most High." Genesis 3:4 - 5 "And the serpent said unto the woman, Ye shall not surely die: For God doth know that in the day ye eat thereof, then your eyes shall be opened, and ye shall be as gods, knowing good and evil."

⁹⁸⁸ Ephesians 2:4 - 7 "But God, who is rich in mercy, for his great love wherewith he loved us, Even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ, (by grace ye are saved;) And hath raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus: That in the ages to come he might shew the exceeding riches of his grace in his kindness toward us through Christ Jesus.

to the first Adam, but to the last Adam, Jesus Christ.⁹⁸⁹ And of Him the writer notes both the obvious reality of God's promise: "Sit on my right hand, until I make thine enemies thy footstool"⁹⁹⁰ which he contrasts with the appearance of what his eyes tell him: "But now we see not yet all things put under him." This is exactly the plight of the Psalmist in the verse under consideration. He sees much evil around him. He looks for God's salvation. But he does not see yet that reality of God's governance which already subsists and of which his entire life (and ours) is a part. The consolation for all such distressed souls who cry out to God "It is time for thee, LORD, to work" lies not in beholding abstract acts of divine governance that put down specific acts of evil human governance (though we do rejoice at providential interventions) but to see God's eternal plan working out every moment of every day in the Person and ongoing work of Jesus Christ "who was made a little lower than the angels for the suffering of death, crowned with glory and honor; that he by the grace of God should taste death for every man." To see this same Jesus seated on the right hand of the Majesty on High interceding for us as God's governance proceeds according to His good pleasure for us and until Jesus' enemies be made His footstool. The visible manifestation of God's great work stretches from the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil in the Garden to the Marriage Supper of the Lamb in Heaven, but in actuality it stretches from "everlasting to everlasting" according to the omniscience, omnipotence, and especially the love of God. The day that the psalmist longs for will come "when he shall have put down all rule and all authority and power."⁹⁹¹ But as we await that moment, we keep "looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith; who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God."⁹⁹²

⁹⁸⁹ 1 Corinthians 15:20 - 25, 45 - 47 "But now is Christ risen from the dead, and become the first fruits of them that slept. For since by man came death, by man came also the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive But every man in his own order: Christ the first fruits; afterward they that are Christ's at his coming. Then cometh the end, when he shall have delivered up the kingdom to God, even the Father; when he shall have put down all rule and all authority and power. For he must reign, till he hath put all enemies under his feet." ... "And so it is written, 'The first man Adam was made a living soul; the last Adam was made a quickening spirit.' Howbeit that was not first which is spiritual, but that which is natural; and afterward that which is spiritual. The first man is of the earth, earthy: the second man is the Lord from heaven."

⁹⁹⁰ Hebrews 1:13b quoting Psalm 110:1. The Psalm is clearly Messianic, Jesus refers to it to confound the Pharisees who maintained that the Messiah should be the son of David but failed to grasp that He would also be the Son of God, so that David should appropriately call Him "My Lord" (see the account in Matthew 22:41- 46)

⁹⁹¹ 1 Corinthians 15:24 - 27 "Then cometh the end, when he shall have delivered up the kingdom to God, even the Father; when he shall have put down all rule and all authority and power; for he must reign, till he hath put all enemies under his feet. The last enemy that shall be destroyed is death; for he hath put all things under his feet. But when he saith all things are put under him, it is manifest that he is excepted, which did put all things under him."

⁹⁹² Heb 12:2

The Choices We Make

... they have made void thy law.

¹²⁷ Therefore I love thy commandments above gold;

Yea, above fine gold.

¹²⁸ Therefore I esteem all thy precepts concerning all things to be right;

And I hate every false way.



Some years ago, my family was engaged in the sale of various antiques. We adopted a common saying in the business, that the best customer was an informed customer. The saying meant that when a customer was aware of the value of an antique (its provenance, its age, its place in history, its aesthetic, etc.) they were more willing to pay the price to purchase the object, because such transactions are at their most elemental level value given for value received. The two verses under consideration are valuations of God's commandments and precepts, basically what He has said and how He has shown the psalmist to think about them. He clearly sets their value above gold and has the highest esteem for (*i.e.* the highest estimate of the worth of) the way God has revealed His thinking on such matters. If this were all the psalmist said, the verses would be a stand-alone valuation with no further action taken, in much the way that we see a great painting in a museum and recognize its enormous worth but can do nothing further to possess it.

But the psalmist has said much more. These verses are a statement of love and hate. "I love thy commandments ... and I hate every false way." But his love and hate are also conditional upon what has gone before. "... they have made void thy law. Therefore, I love thy commandments ... therefore I esteem all thy precepts concerning all things to be right; and (*therefore*) I hate every false way." What has gone before are the several interrelated choices the psalmist has made in contradistinction to evildoers who make void thy law. "Depart from me, ye evildoers: for I will keep the commandments of my God. (115) ... I have done judgment and justice (121a) ... Deal with thy servant according unto thy mercy, and teach me thy statutes. (124) ... I am thy servant; give me understanding, that I may know thy testimonies." (125) For their part the evil doers (evidently) have not departed from him but have pushed back against the psalmist's resolve by seeking to oppress him. So, it becomes necessary for him to cry, "Leave me not to mine oppressors. Be surety for thy servant for good: let not the proud oppress me." (121b, 122) As noted in an earlier lesson, the plea "be surety" is a legal and financial term that suggests that the power that evil doers had to oppress him came to through their acquisition of wealth, ill-gotten by means of making the law of God "void." These intertwining statements suggest that two antithetical sets of transactions have been taking place: that of the Psalmist with God and the evil doers with gold. The

context suggests that both transactions rest on diametrically opposed valuations of what God has said. The psalmist's valuation is "I love thy commandments above gold." The evil doers' valuation is 'I love gold above thy commandments.' It is on the basis of these two diametrically opposed valuations that two widely different choices have been made. The psalmist has made his choice. "I have done judgment and justice." But what have the evil doers chosen? "I will be rich and increased with goods." The reader may object that the psalmist does not explain the choice that the evildoer or the proud who would oppress, has made.⁹⁹³ But the psalmist does tell us two things about their choice: they have made void thy law and their way (which he hates) is false.

These two assertions point to a fundamental error relative to how the proud "see" the law that underlies both their valuation of God's word and their choice to serve gold instead of God. Their actions declare that they see the law only as a restraint and not a constraint. While this may be true of human ordinances, it is not true of God's law. While many of the commandments are framed in the negative ("thou shalt not...") and as such do provide restraint, the core of the law is positive. "All the law is fulfilled in one word, even in this; Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself."⁹⁹⁴ Love constrains. Of his ministry to the Corinthians (and doubtless to all believers) the Apostle Paul could say, "... the love of Christ constraineth us... ."⁹⁹⁵ God gave the law as a guide for human behavior in everyday relationships, not just with Him but with everyone that we live with. So, when the psalmist says I have done judgment and justice, he is not referring to his dealings with God, but with people. His love for his neighbor has constrained him to seek justice for the oppressed and protection for the vulnerable. "Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this, to visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and to keep himself unspotted from the world."⁹⁹⁶ But the selfishness of those who serve gold ignores the constraints of love for one's neighbor. They acquire wealth without reference to the impact that their actions have on others around them. If they are ever asked what they are doing, they will say, "We do no wrong" but they will not say what the psalmist has said "I have done justice." Even as

⁹⁹³ There is sufficient support for such an inference, however, throughout the Scriptures. The parable of the rich fool who tore down his barns to build bigger so that he could hoard his increase rather than share the abundance with the needy all around him. The rebuke to the Church at Laodicea in Revelation 3:14 – 19 summarizes the tragic situation quite well: "And unto the angel of the church of the Laodiceans write; These things saith the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the beginning of the creation of God; I know thy works, that thou art neither cold nor hot: I would thou wert cold or hot. So then because thou art lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spew thee out of my mouth. Because thou sayest, I am rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing; and knowest not that thou art wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked: I counsel thee to buy of me gold tried in the fire, that thou mayest be rich; and white raiment, that thou mayest be clothed, and that the shame of thy nakedness do not appear; and anoint thine eyes with eye salve, that thou mayest see. As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten: be zealous therefore, and repent."

⁹⁹⁴ Galatians 5:13 - 14 For, brethren, ye have been called unto liberty; only use not liberty for an occasion to the flesh, but by love serve one another. For all the law is fulfilled in one word, even in this; Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself.

⁹⁹⁵ 2 Corinthians 5:13 - 14 "For whether we be beside ourselves, it is to God: or whether we be sober, it is for your cause. For the love of Christ constraineth us; because we thus judge, that if one died for all, then were all dead".

⁹⁹⁶ James 1:27

they turn a blind eye to their responsibility for the impact that their actions have on others around them, they proclaim that they are lawful citizens. "Am I my brother's keeper?"⁹⁹⁷ Cain asked as he lied to God. Their ways are marked by falsehood, and by their willful ignorance they make void the real intent of God's law. Their sins are generally sins of omission not commission. They do not lie; they omit to tell the truth because they have chosen to ignore it. They do not steal; they omit to show mercy because they covet the gold of the vulnerable as they turn a blind eye to the terrible necessity of the indigent. They have no conscience because they have seared it. They tear down their barns to build bigger to hold on to the increase of their pursuits and forget the hungry who are their neighbors. God comes to them as a poor neighbor and they refuse Him.⁹⁹⁸ But when He comes to them as the Judge of all the earth, it will be another story.

⁹⁹⁷ Genesis 4:8 -9 "And Cain talked with Abel his brother: and it came to pass, when they were in the field, that Cain rose up against Abel his brother, and slew him. And the LORD said unto Cain, 'Where is Abel thy brother?' And he said, 'I know not: Am I my brother's keeper?'"

⁹⁹⁸ Matthew 25:31-33, 41-45 "When the Son of man shall come in his glory, and all the holy angels with him, then shall he sit upon the throne of his glory: And before him shall be gathered all nations: and he shall separate them one from another, as a shepherd divideth his sheep from the goats ... Then shall he say also unto them on the left hand, 'Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels: For I was an hungered, and ye gave me no meat: I was thirsty, and ye gave me no drink: I was a stranger, and ye took me not in: naked, and ye clothed me not: sick, and in prison, and ye visited me not.' Then shall they also answer him, saying, 'Lord, when saw we thee an hungered, or athirst, or a stranger, or naked, or sick, or in prison, and did not minister unto thee?' Then shall he answer them, saying, 'Verily I say unto you, inasmuch as ye did it not to one of the least of these, ye did it not to me.' And these shall go away into everlasting punishment: but the righteous into life eternal."

פ (PE)

☞ Joy of Enlightenment ☞

129 Thy testimonies are wonderful:
Therefore doth my soul keep them
130 The entrance of thy words giveth light;
It giveth understanding unto the simple.

☞ Holy Desire ☞

131 I opened my mouth, and panted:
For I longed for thy commandments

☞ A Cry for Mercy ☞

132 Look thou upon me, and be merciful unto me,
As thou usest to do unto those that love thy name.

☞ Providential Deliverance ☞

133 Order my steps in thy word:
And let not any iniquity have dominion over me.

134 Deliver me from the oppression of man:
So will I keep thy precepts

☞ Fellowship of Sorrow ☞

135 Make thy face to shine upon thy servant;
And teach me thy statutes.

136 Rivers of waters run down mine eyes,
Because they keep not thy law

☞

פ - Pe means the mouth or speech. The focus of this octave is clearly on the mouth of God. All seven of the words used to describe God's verbal communication occur in this octave: word(s) (דבר *dabar* and אמרה *'imrah*), commandment, statutes, precepts, testimonies, and law. It should be clear to all that when God speaks to us, we must listen. It is not uncommon, however, to hear believers and other people say that God has told them or shown them this or that. But how are we to be certain? We know that God may choose to speak through a human agent for God tells Jeremiah, "Then the LORD put forth his hand, and touched my mouth (peh). And the LORD said unto me, Behold, I have put my words (dabar) in thy mouth (peh)."⁹⁹⁹ But just as certainly God says to Israel, "For thus saith the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel; Let not your prophets and your diviners, that be in the midst of you, deceive you, neither hearken to your dreams which ye cause to be dreamed. For they prophesy falsely unto you in my

⁹⁹⁹ Jeremiah 1:9

name: I have not sent them, saith the LORD."¹⁰⁰⁰ No wonder John the Apostle advises the believers to try the spirits.

"Beloved, believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God: because many false prophets are gone out into the world. Hereby know ye the Spirit of God: Every spirit that confesseth that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is of God: And every spirit that confesseth not that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is not of God: and this is that spirit of antichrist, whereof ye have heard that it should come; and even now already is it in the world." ¹⁰⁰¹

John had to contend with the emergence of the Gnostic heresy which is why he gives the particular test that he does. But is there another way that we can know that God is really speaking? There are at least three witnesses that I have known in experience that signal the miracle of the working of God's word in the life of a believer harmony, enlightenment, and transformation.

Harmony: We have in the Bible, the collected word of God. Even though humanly it was written over a long time by several authors, there is a manifest one-ness about its testimony. God is one and immutable, so all that He says we may validly expect to harmonize. An individual saying may appear different from others, but on closer and prayerful examination, the spiritual reader discovers the underlying harmony. After many years of reading and reflecting on the scriptures, there is in each believer a significant deposit of revealed truth. And just as certainly, if God should choose to communicate with any of us by some means, we can expect that what we hear and understand will harmonize with what we already know of God's word. Moreover, it should be manifestly "profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness."¹⁰⁰² Doubtful disputations that bring disharmony are more likely the work of the flesh.¹⁰⁰³

Enlightenment: The psalmist tells us, "The entrance of thy words giveth light. It giveth understanding unto the simple." (130) When God speaks to us, even though we may have heard the exact words before, if it suddenly brings a clearer view of how things are with God, with us, and with the world around us, we can be fairly certain that God has spoken. Harmony and enlightenment are two witnesses that can establish that a thing is from God,¹⁰⁰⁴ but there is a third witness that is incontrovertible.

¹⁰⁰⁰ Jeremiah 29:8 - 9

¹⁰⁰¹ 1 John 4:1-3

¹⁰⁰² 2 Timothy 3:16 All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness:

¹⁰⁰³ Romans 14:1 Him that is weak in the faith receive ye, but not to doubtful disputations.

2 Timothy 2:14 Of these things put them in remembrance, charging them before the Lord that they strive not about words to no profit, but to the subverting of the hearers. ... 2:24 And the servant of the Lord must not strive; but be gentle unto all men, apt to teach, patient,

¹⁰⁰⁴ Deuteronomy 19:15 One witness shall not rise up against a man for any iniquity, or for any sin, in any sin that he sinneth: **at the mouth of two witnesses, or at the mouth of three witnesses, shall the matter be established.**

Transformation: When Jesus healed a man blind from birth, the blind man was interrogated by the Pharisees because the healing took place on the Sabbath. When they said unto him “Give God the praise: we know that this man (i.e. Jesus) is a sinner;” he answered, “Whether he be a sinner or no, I know not: one thing I know, that, whereas I was blind, now I see. ... Now we know that God heareth not sinners: but if any man be a worshipper of God, and doeth his will, him he heareth. Since the world began was it not heard that any man opened the eyes of one that was born blind. If this man were not of God, he could do nothing.”¹⁰⁰⁵ Only God can change the human heart. Only He can change lives for the good. If, therefore, a remarkable life change for the good has occurred in response to the word, we may be sure that God has spoken. Jesus told the disciples, “Believest thou not that I am in the Father, and the Father in me? The words that I speak unto you I speak not of myself: but the Father that dwelleth in me, he doeth the works. Believe me that I am in the Father, and the Father in me: or else believe me for the very works' sake.”¹⁰⁰⁶ This octave provides us several criteria that describe the transformations of the psalmist’s life and, if we step back (like the artist reviewing his progress in painting) we may see them easily.

Joy of Enlightenment (129-130): Education often focuses on giving knowledge to the mind and skills to the hand. But education fails when it does not give light to the soul. Light to the soul is guidance to the will and joy to the heart.¹⁰⁰⁷ When God speaks to us, even though we may have heard the exact words before, if those words suddenly bring a clearer view of how things are with God, with us, and with the world around us, we may understand that God has been speaking to us. “Thy testimonies are wonderful ... The entrance of thy words giveth light.” Once this type of learning is tasted, the person will never be satisfied with less. Such a gift awakens a holy desire for more. It is the difference between the student and the scholar.

Holy Desire (131): Teachers teach, but learning is hard business. It takes time and effort. Learning demands a desire to learn on the part of the students. Without that desire, education will fail. More money and assets poured into the process is like money down a bottomless well. Love of learning, like any love, cannot be bought. It must be begotten by love. If the teacher does not love the subject, it is most likely that the students never will either. But love of the teacher, when it begets love in the students, also shows great mercy to slow students who want to learn but have difficulties. When God grants the joy of enlightenment, the earnest student will say with the psalmist, “I opened my mouth, and panted for I longed for thy commandments.” But enlightenment and the

¹⁰⁰⁵ John 9:1-33

¹⁰⁰⁶ John 14:10-11

¹⁰⁰⁷ Psalm 119:105 Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path.

accompanying burning desire for God also bring self awareness of our limitations and failure. They bring forth ...

A Cry for Mercy (132): “Look thou upon me, and be merciful unto me” is the plea of the unworthy and slow student. In God’s classroom, we are all slow and unworthy students because of the disability of indwelling sin which predisposes us to contradict every word that God utters. When God sees the blossoming of His love in our hearts ¹⁰⁰⁸ (not the sinless perfection of our performance – which never will be there in this world) He looks upon us with a shining face. He knows that we need a pedagogue, one who will come along side (*agoge*) to watch every step that our foot (*pede*) takes. And in what direction will this loving Pedagogue take us?

Providential Deliverance (133 – 134): The Pedagogue will “order my steps in thy word and let not any iniquity have dominion over me.” He will also “deliver me from the oppression of man: so will I keep thy precepts.” The work of sanctification is the work of the Holy Spirit. It is He who teaches us all things.¹⁰⁰⁹ He leads us away from our predisposition to be enthralled with sin and the sinful people who manipulate us by means of their lies and our vulnerabilities and He leads us toward the loving obedience to God wherein true freedom lies. Love sets the will free even as it constrains us to serve the beloved in our freedom.

Fellowship of Sorrow (135 – 136): The joy of enlightenment in this psalm ends in the fellowship of sorrow. How can this be? When God has led us to Himself and fulfilled our holy desire to be with Him and to be like Him in fellowship, our hearts are opened to bear His sorrow at those around us who choose to ignore His word and who “keep not thy law.” Given this strange turn from joy at enlightenment to sorrow at lawlessness, we might ask, “Why should I bear such sorrow?” We need look no farther than Jesus, who for love of God and us, bore our sorrows that we might forever know the joy and fulfillment of fellowship with God.

“Surely he hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows: yet we did esteem him stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted. But he was wounded for our transgressions; he was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon him; and with his stripes we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way; and the LORD hath laid on him the iniquity of us all.” ¹⁰¹⁰

Certainly, God has spoken to us when we have become more like our loving Lord Jesus.

¹⁰⁰⁸ Romans 5:1-5 Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ: By whom also we have access by faith into this grace wherein we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God. And not only so, but we glory in tribulations also: knowing that tribulation worketh patience; And patience, experience; and experience, hope: And hope maketh not ashamed; because the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost which is given unto us.

¹⁰⁰⁹ John 14:26 But the Comforter, which is the Holy Ghost, whom the Father will send in my name, he shall teach you all things, and bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you.

¹⁰¹⁰ Isaiah 53:4- 6

Wonderful Words of Life

¹²⁵ I am thy servant; give me understanding,
That I may know thy testimonies.

...

D - PE

¹²⁹ Thy testimonies are wonderful:
Therefore, doth my soul keep them.



Verse 129 contains the only mention of wonder in this entire psalm. Wonder is one of several possible purely affective responses to someone or something that we encounter. Allied to awe, it is often induced by both the size or scale of the person or object encountered as well as the unknown that surrounds them. Wonder has the capacity to reshape our view of the world and ourselves in that world, in very positive ways. “When I consider thy heavens, the work of thy fingers, the moon and the stars, which thou hast ordained? What is man, that thou art mindful of him and the son of man, that thou visitest him?”¹⁰¹¹ Size and incomprehensibility may be why wonder is often associated with childhood. Small children, who know very little of themselves or the world around them, are more prone to experience wonder in their encounters with the big, the exotic, and/or the unknown. With adults, the vastness of God’s creation, His works, continue to elicit awe and wonder. Whether atmospheric (a glorious sunset), terrestrial (the Grand Canyon), celestial (the starry vastness of the night sky), or very proximate and intimate (the interior of a flower), “many, O LORD my God, are thy wonderful works which thou hast done...”¹⁰¹²

Wonder, as an emotion, is seldom unaccompanied. In most cases, the cognitive faculty of the mind is quickly engaged. We don’t just wonder at something or someone; we wonder why, or what, or how. Wonder (and awe) initiate a process of reflection or pondering. In the Nativity story in Luke, the shepherds manifest unusual behavior going around the town of Bethlehem telling what appears to the towns people (and strangers in the town for the census) a tall tale (or a wonderful story) of their experience of a vast angelic choir on the previous evening and their encounter with a baby born in a stable and lying in a manger who was the object of that heavenly polyphony. “All they that heard it wondered at those things which were told them by the shepherds. But Mary kept all these things, and pondered them in her heart.”¹⁰¹³ Mary heard their story and was filled with wonder. If someone told you that your recent experience of giving birth was the theme of a heavenly choir of angels, wouldn’t you wonder who you really

¹⁰¹¹ Psalm 8:3 - 4

¹⁰¹² Psalm 45:5a

¹⁰¹³ Luke 2:18 -19

are and what you have really just done? So, Mary (unlike the less invested villagers) kept the shepherds' testimony in her heart to support of the interior process of pondering. And pondering leads frequently to a new or revised view of both our world and ourselves in that world.

In the previous octave, the psalmist had requested a better understanding of just how God sees the world and His testimony of that vision. But to know God's testimonies one must internalize that testimonial vision and to make it their own. Internalization rests upon the process partly described in this verse: wondering, keeping, and reflecting with the intent of making those testimonies known to one's self not just intellectually as in memorization, but understood experientially, as a matter of the heart where they are kept as a treasure. The answer to the psalmist's prayer "I am thy servant; give me understanding, that I may know thy testimonies" calls for nothing less than an encounter with the God who spoke the universe into being, the One who has created all the awesome and incomprehensible natural things and phenomena that we wonder at, the great God of all Wonders. And He answers; He speaks!  – pe means the mouth. One can almost see in the pictogram the lips, the teeth, and the tongue of the mouth forming a word of utterance, a word of power, the word of life itself. When Jesus is tempted to violate His servant status and take independent action by making stones into bread, He answers "Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God."¹⁰¹⁴ He takes no action, because He has not received any word from His Father to do so and human necessity does not supersede obedience to God's word. There God the Father is silent. Here, He speaks and that testimony fills the psalmist with awe and wonder at His sublime utterance!

But these utterances of God (His testimonies) are of all His utterances the most situation specific and the most immediately applicable to where we are spiritually. The very first question that God asks of man, He asks of Adam, "Where art thou?"¹⁰¹⁵ And the place where we most need and most often encounter God is at the point of our deepest necessity and in the present moment. God is always in the place where we are and always able to meet our deepest need. It is we who are unaware of His presence. "And Jacob awaked out of his sleep, and he said, 'Surely the LORD is in this place; and I knew it not.' And he was afraid, and said, 'How dreadful is this place! this is none other but the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven.'"¹⁰¹⁶ But when we like Job encounter the Awesome One who fills us with wonder and dread, things happen to us. Our view of the world and our place in it change. We change our way of thinking. We repent. "I have heard of thee by the hearing of the ear: but now mine eye seeth thee. Wherefore I

¹⁰¹⁴ Matthew 4:4b

¹⁰¹⁵ Genesis 3:9

¹⁰¹⁶ Genesis 28:16

abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes”¹⁰¹⁷ But repentance is not just an act of the mind. It is a sign of a far deeper interior change. When we think differently, we act differently. The character of our life is different because our life is different. That testimony which the ‘mouth’ of God utters to the willing and loving heart that seeks Him earnestly in prayer is the word of life itself. “... The words that I speak unto you, they are spirit, and they are life”¹⁰¹⁸ - wonderful words of life.

Reflecting God’s Glory

¹²⁹ Thy testimonies are wonderful:

Therefore, doth my soul keep them.

¹³⁰ The entrance of thy words giveth light;

It giveth understanding unto the simple.



There is a difference between treasuring something because of its source and treasuring something because of its intrinsic or pragmatic worth to us as part of our life. It is the difference between a beautiful old tool that our grandfather left us, well-worn through years of use and precious as a family heirloom, and the same tool that we use every day to earn our living. There is a measure of practicality in the latter. The psalmist had asked “give me understanding, that I may know thy testimonies.” (125b) In answer, he has been given the very testimonies that he sought and held them close in his heart as wonderful treasures because he knew they were “**Thy** testimonies.” His wonder was focused at their source and the incomparable great kindness of God in giving them to him. But, again, it is one thing to enter into those testimonies and quite another (though related) to have them enter into you. The former is full of “wonder” because of the psalmist’s childlike awe of the God who gave them. It is inheriting your grandfather’s tools and wondering what he did with them. The latter is “light” because suddenly the old tool is seen as supremely well-made and eminently serviceable to serve yet another craftsman: yourself. If wonder gave rise to reflection, as we observed in the previous verse, reflection here gives rise to possession in a practical way. Light is a metaphor for understanding, ‘thy words give light; (they) give understanding unto the simple.’ We understand the role of light in daily living. Without light in the house, we cannot walk

¹⁰¹⁷ Job 42:1 - 6 “Then Job answered the LORD, and said, ‘I know that thou canst do everything, and that no thought can be withholden from thee. {no thought can be...: or, no thought of thine can be hindered} Who is he that hideth counsel without knowledge? Therefore, have I uttered that I understood not; things too wonderful for me, which I knew not. Hear, I beseech thee, and I will speak: I will demand of thee, and declare thou unto me.* I have heard of thee by the hearing of the ear: but now mine eye seeth thee. Wherefore I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes.’”

*{**Hear, I beseech thee, and I will speak**,.... Not in the manner he had before, complaining of God and justifying himself, but in a way of humble entreaty of favours of him, of confession of sin before him, and of acknowledgment of his wisdom, goodness, and justice in all his dealings with him, which before he arraigned; **I will demand of thee...** ; or rather “I will make petition to thee”,) from John Gill’s Commentary

¹⁰¹⁸ John 6:63b

without bumping into a door or worse falling down stairs. Light enables us to make wise decisions and avoid costly mistakes and accidents. Even so, understanding the general principles embedded in the words of God's testimonies about specific circumstances enables the thoughtful hearer to make wise life decisions and avoid costly and painful accidents. If the first verse (129) was about the joy of discovering a peculiar treasure, this second verse (130) is about the joy of enlightenment which that treasure has given.

The verse is particularly interesting in that it reflects (in a relatively rare way) how the psalmist sees himself. The light of understanding is given to the simple. The word translated simple is פְּתִי (pronounced peth-ee') from a primitive root word פָּתַח (pronounced paw-thaw') meaning to be open, roomy or figuratively be in a mental or moral sense to be simple. So, the sense of the word used here is to be silly, easily seducible, foolish, simple. It is used only three times in the psalms, once in Ezekiel, and fourteen times in Proverbs, for obvious reasons. In Proverbs, the natural state of the simple is devoid of the understanding of wisdom.¹⁰¹⁹ But that lack also makes them ideal candidates for instruction in wisdom if only they will listen.¹⁰²⁰ The picture in Psalms is analogous. "The law of the LORD is perfect, converting the soul: the testimony of the LORD is sure, making wise the simple."¹⁰²¹ Furthermore, the simple are of particular interest to the LORD perhaps because of their potential for instruction or their increased vulnerability to being misled. "The LORD preserveth the simple: I was brought low, and he helped me."¹⁰²²

But the definition of simple is not simple. The notion carries with it several overtones including singularity and therefore oneness (or unity) of personality as well as behavior, a lack of cognitive ability, and a great capacity for uncritical belief. All of these are found in children in their early stages of development. It is the childlike wonder in the previous verse that is effectively linked with childlike simplicity in this verse.

Singularity, oneness, unity – The term simple (or more exactly simplicity) is one of the descriptors of God Himself. It harks back to the *Shama* of Israel. "Hear, (שְׁמַע - *shama*) O Israel: The LORD our God is one LORD: And thou shalt love the LORD thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy might."¹⁰²³ That which is one is simple and without parts. In order to avoid the charge of tri-theism, Christian doctrine asserts (rightly) that God is one *in essence* but manifest in three persons (Father, Son,

¹⁰¹⁹ Proverbs 7:6 - 7 For at the window of my house I looked through my casement, And beheld among the simple ones, I discerned among the youths, a young man void of understanding,

¹⁰²⁰ Proverbs 9:1 - 6 Wisdom hath builded her house, she hath hewn out her seven pillars. She hath killed her beasts; she hath mingled her wine; she hath also furnished her table. She hath sent forth her maidens: she crieth upon the highest places of the city, Whoso is simple, let him turn in hither: as for him that wanteth understanding, she saith to him, Come, eat of my bread, and drink of the wine which I have mingled. Forsake the foolish, and live; and go in the way of understanding.

¹⁰²¹ Psalm 19:7

¹⁰²² Psalm 116:6

¹⁰²³ Deuteronomy 4:5 - 6

Holy Spirit). “Metaphysical simplicity states that the characteristics of God (*i.e. essential attributes* ¹⁰²⁴) are not parts of God that together make up God. God is simple; God is those characteristics. For example, God does not *have* goodness but simply *is* goodness.”¹⁰²⁵ The essential attributes of God are thus not parts of God. The (boundless) attributes of God are God. God is love; is merciful, is omniscient, is omnipotent, is eternal, is but not as parts. God is not compounded of the various essential attributes as though they were separable from one another or from Him. God is one, simple and undivided. Simplicity, as noted by the psalmist concerning himself, refers in part to his mind and his desires. He is focused exclusively on the person of God. His eye is, as Jesus describes it, “single” ¹⁰²⁶ and his mind, as James warns us, is not “double minded.”¹⁰²⁷ Therefore God hears his prayers.

Lack of cognitive ability – The term simple-minded refers to a certain lack of cognitive ability, particularly as it pertains to the ability to learn that duplicity of affect which we euphemistically call “social grace.” That is not to say there are no gracious people, but grace always should arise from within in the heart, not be fabricated, hypocritically, by clever minds in order to deceive the simple. In a larger sense, simple people just don’t have the ability to reason down from symptoms to underlying causes. They don’t think because they have difficulty doing so. Again, they are like children whose mental faculties have not yet developed. That is why, people with such cognitive deficiency seem locked in a perpetual childhood and, as such, are particularly vulnerable and susceptible to deception.

Capacity for uncritical belief – Children have this ability to a remarkable extent. It is only with passing years and painful experience that they, like their parents, discard childhood simplicity in favor of adult duplicity. They become wise in the ways of the world and yet often remain simple in the ways of God! “Professing themselves to be wise, they became fools” ¹⁰²⁸ Yet the *sine qua non* of the revelation of God is faith. “But without faith it is impossible to please him: for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him.”¹⁰²⁹

Simplicity, then, presents both an opportunity and a challenge to God: how to communicate with the simple who have a great capability to believe but lack the mental

¹⁰²⁴ My gloss

¹⁰²⁵ Wikipedia article on “Divine Simplicity”

¹⁰²⁶ Matthew 6:22 - 23 The light of the body is the eye: if therefore thine eye be single, thy whole body shall be full of light. But if thine eye be evil, (*i.e. focused on and wandering between God and Mammon*) thy whole body shall be full of darkness. If therefore the light that is in thee be darkness, how great is that darkness!

¹⁰²⁷ James 1:5 -8 If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him. But let him ask in faith, nothing wavering. For he that wavereth is like a wave of the sea driven with the wind and tossed. For let not that man think that he shall receive any thing of the Lord. A double minded man is unstable in all his ways.

¹⁰²⁸ Romans 1:21 - 23 Because that, when they knew God, they glorified him not as God, neither were thankful; but became vain in their imaginations, and their foolish heart was darkened. Professing themselves to be wise, they became fools, and changed the glory of the uncorruptible God into an image made like to corruptible man, and to birds, and fourfooted beasts, and creeping things.

¹⁰²⁹ Hebrews 11:6

skills to achieve real understanding on their own. The obvious answer is: simple words for simple people. But God is light and of necessity, therefore, He must speak truth. And herein lies the wonder of His wisdom: that children can possess truths by faith that 'wise' men have difficulty understanding. The truth they receive, the word that fills them with light is simple, not in mere wording but in depth. It is profound truth. Men have long understood that as we go deeper, things become simpler. Increasing complexity does not mark forward progress toward ultimate truth. Blessed simpletons in possession of profound truth are those "divine fools" that have corrected kings with their apparently obnoxious wisdom and done so with impunity. This verse points us toward what lies at the core of Jesus famous saying: "Except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven."¹⁰³⁰ These are they who have the very word of God, not as simplistic sayings that would masquerade as deep truth, but as profound truth indeed, simple in principle but applicable in numberless complex situations in life. H.L Mencken's dictum: "For every complex problem there is an answer that is clear, simple, and wrong" is certainly applicable to the endless simplistic platitudes of which the human mind is capable of generating aplenty, but it is not applicable to the simplicity that is God. In speaking forth that which they have received from Him, they reflect the glory of God's transcendent wisdom, a wisdom unattainable by any other purely human means.

Holy Desire

¹³⁰ The entrance of thy words giveth light;
It giveth understanding unto the simple.

¹³¹ I opened my mouth, and panted:
For I longed for thy commandments.



James tells us "If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him."¹⁰³¹ Considering James and the preceding verse (130), we might be tempted to believe that all one needs do is behave like a child and ask, and God will be constrained by His love to impart His deepest wisdom to us. But world is full of 'simple' people, and very few of them are in possession of such profound truth. There were doubtless many pious and simple people in the middle ages who prayed oft to God, but there were few 'royal fools' whose gifted advice was prized despite its deceptively shoddy wrapper. Why this apparent dichotomy?

¹⁰³⁰ Matthew 18:3 - 5 And said, Verily I say unto you, Except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven. Whosoever therefore shall humble himself as this little child, the same is greatest in the kingdom of heaven. And whoso shall receive one such little child in my name receiveth me.

¹⁰³¹ James 1:5

It is easy to speculate that not all simple folk believe and so do not ask. But there are those who also have asked and still lack such depth. Why so? If we think about the difference between simplicity and duplicity, singleness of mind and doublemindedness as it occurs in the epistle of James, we see that it is not just prayer that results in the granting of Divine wisdom. What is missing, in a word, is holy desire for it. James goes on to remind us that “A double minded man is unstable in all his ways.”¹⁰³² Jesus amplifies this in His teaching about the desires which direct the focus of the human eye.

*“The light of the body is the eye: if therefore thine eye be single, thy whole body shall be full of light. But if thine eye be evil, thy whole body shall be full of darkness. If therefore the light that is in thee be darkness, how great is that darkness! No man can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon.”*¹⁰³³

What Jesus and James are telling us is that servants tend to keep their eye on the one they serve. If we truly are God’s servants, as the psalmist asserted of himself in the last octave (note the previous octave was λ – ain the eye), then our desire will truly be to serve Him. And if our desire is truly to serve Him, then we will keep our eye on Him. “Behold, as the eyes of servants look unto the hand of their masters, and as the eyes of a maiden unto the hand of her mistress; So, our eyes wait upon the LORD our God, until that he have mercy upon us.”¹⁰³⁴ The evidence of single minded service is a ‘single eye’. But not every professed ‘servant of God’ is thus minded. Duplicious servants of God cannot hide their doublemindedness from Him because He sees their wandering eye. The nature of doublemindedness lies in great part in desires that are drawn first after one object of desire and then after another, classically alternating between God and mammon. How many times have each of us been frustrated by a waitperson in a restaurant that just never looked our way but was too busy with others or worse chatting with other wait staff to notice us. We wave our hands finally in desperation in order to gain their attention which is focused elsewhere. Such is the behavior of the ‘evil eye’ and it is unwittingly calculated to reduce the tip.¹⁰³⁵

The granting, then, of divine depth of wisdom, the gift of enlightenment that fills the soul with the light of understanding, rests not just upon the realization of need, nor yet upon the prayer that petitions for such light, but the insatiable desire for it. The simple soul desires it. The single mind requests it. The single eye looks to the hand of God for it. So, immediately after reading “The entrance of thy words giveth light. It giveth

¹⁰³² James 1:8

¹⁰³³ Matthew 6:22 - 24

¹⁰³⁴ Psalm 123:2

¹⁰³⁵ TIP (an acronym for To Insure Promptitude) tells the whole story. Good service merits rewards, because good servants are diligent to serve.

understanding unto the simple”, we read “I opened my mouth, and panted: for I longed for thy commandments.”

“Opening wide the mouth (פ - pe) suggests desire and craving (c.f. Job 29:23; Isa 5:14). ‘Panting’ underlines the image (c.f. Job 5:5; 7:2; 36:20) and ‘longing’ underlines it yet again. Longing for YHVH’s commands is like a hungry person’s longing for food, or a laborer’s longing for the end of the day; or the ground’s desire for rain, or Sheol’s desire for people to die.”¹⁰³⁶

But, we might ask, did not God just grant the psalmist’s request? (130) So why then does he protest that he is still hungry? (131) We may get a better understanding if we consider the world of birds. Doubtless we have all seen chicks in a nest. Their little eyes constantly look for the supply of food from their mother. Their cry is incessant. And as she approaches, they open their little mouths wide, as if their very life depended on it! Indeed, it does. The weak who do not compete in this way will eat less and may eventually starve. There is a desperate urgency in their singular pursuit of food. Their desire for food is insatiable. The holy desire of the psalmist is the desire for the Holy, Himself – the desire for God. It is singular, without division, ceaseless, and insistent because his life depends on the answer to his prayer. There is a desperation as well as an insatiability in this verse that is almost frightening.

God is transcendent, limitless. When He created us, He created us for Himself.¹⁰³⁷ As part of that creation, He gave us the capacity to desire Him. But the desire for God manifests a certain insatiability because of His very transcendence; a bottomless appetite for a limitless God. But, as implied above, there is also a choice that the individual must make: to ask for that gift of life in God. For simple people who chose to ignore Him in unbelief, there is no awareness of their disparate need, and no prayer. “Ye have not, because ye ask not.”¹⁰³⁸ For those duplicitous souls who seek to exploit the beneficence of God for their own ends, there may be a request, but the answer would only be consumed on other desires. “Ye ask, and receive not, because ye ask amiss, that ye may consume it upon your lusts.”¹⁰³⁹ But for those who cry to God day and night, there arises a light in their darkness. “Behold, I stand at the door, and knock: if any man hears my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me.”¹⁰⁴⁰ Enlightenment is not just about getting some isolated piece of divine wisdom from God. Enlightenment is about having fellowship with Him who is the Light of the World.

¹⁰³⁶ Goldingay Psalms, Vol 3 page 430.

¹⁰³⁷ Revelation 4:11 “Thou art worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honour and power: for thou hast created all things, and for thy pleasure they are and were created.”

¹⁰³⁸ James 4:2 b

¹⁰³⁹ James 4:3

¹⁰⁴⁰ Revelation 3:20

Spiritual CPR

- ¹³¹ I opened my mouth, and panted:
For I longed for thy commandments.
- ¹³² Look thou upon me, and be merciful unto me,
As thou usest to do unto those that love thy name.



My wife and I have been blessed with two daughters that love us dearly. One expression of their love lies in the trust that they show when they call us quite regularly to discuss how things are going in their lives. Each of them, like everyone, has ups and downs. Over the years, we have grown accustomed to sensing how things are going at any particular time by the tone of the very first words that they speak. Whether they are calling to share some joy at a personal victory, or to vent their anger and frustration, or to seek understanding amid confusing events; the tone of their first word usually alerts us as to what's coming. But there is, from their point of view, a moment of real vulnerability after they have called us and spoken to us. Will we rejoice with them or has the busyness of our own lives subsumed our capacity to sympathize? Will we be able to understand the extent of their frustration, even though they may have partly created the situation by some personal error or will we 'moralize' rather than 'sympathize'? Will we be able to patiently help them to sort out the confusing situation even though they don't quite know where to begin or will we lose patience with the unavoidably long reiteration of the particulars of their confusing circumstances.

Love makes us vulnerable. In loving another, we confess that we need them. In opening ourselves to another for help, there is a real possibility that, instead of meeting our need, they will fail us, or worse, use that openness as a kind of bargaining chip in a *quid pro quo* relationship whose central tenor is manipulation. Because love makes us vulnerable in this way, people are often afraid to love because they are surrendering some self-control to another person, to another independent will. Yet the need to love and be loved is central to our healthy existence. Where loving relationships flourish, the individuals involved are quick to meet each other's needs, not as *quid pro quo* but as their expression of a mutually shared love. People who love others and seek help from them, hopefully find (to their delight) that their love is returned in the patience, wisdom, encouragement, and sympathy of those who return their love.

Inevitably there is a moment, often so slight as to go unnoticed, in which love that has been expressed in need is not yet returned. In the case of my daughters that moment comes right after the tenor of their first word has fallen upon my ear. They may go on talking, but they are really waiting for the tone of my first word. They have opened their mouth but they are waiting for me to open mine. Love needs reassurance. Do you still love me, the heart asks itself in a moment when it hangs suspended between

'heaven' and 'hell'? Heartfelt words like "I'm sorry you're having difficulty", or "I see that you are confused", or "I'm so happy for you" are the very assurance that that love desperately needs.

The verse before us is describing such a moment. It is the exquisite moment of silence before the psalmist's plighted love is reciprocated. The vision of the human face with its incredible ability to communicate emotions without words is clearly in play here. How many of us use those little ikons of the human emotions that show in cartoons of the human visage – emote/icons or emoticons? Their number is myriad (∞)! In verse 131, the psalmist has 'opened his mouth, and panted with longing for God's commandments.' He is the simple soul who loves God above all others. His is the single mind of undivided love that cries out to his Beloved. His is the single eye that looks to the 'mouth' of God (☞ pe) for the assurance of love. And the mouth can say so much without saying anything!

The painters of icons understand this non-verbal moment of truth. In painting icons, apart from all the other artistic features that make icons what they are, there is the painting of the human visage, the face. Invariably the painter of the icon tries to capture the very moment that we have here. The face of Jesus is seen, let us say, in *Christus Pantocrator* (Christ the Lord if all – the judge). But no attempt is made to convey anything other than emotional silence particularly as it pertains to the cast of Jesus' mouth. It places the worshiper emotionally where the psalmist is in this verse. It is not that the psalmist does not "see" the face of God. His vision is that of a face that is 'silent'. There is no non-verbal communication of anything either good or bad. It is the moment when the one who loves God and has confessed that love realizes their utter dependence on God! It is that moment when the individual realizes that apart from God, they will surely die! The psalmist takes comfort and hope from God's past responses to others who loved Him with all their heart and mind and soul: "Look thou upon me, and be merciful unto me, *as thou usest to do unto those that love thy name*. He pleads that God would 'smile' upon him as He did to others who loved His name and similarly cried out to Him.

Why is this painful moment of uncertainty necessary? Is God playing games with those who love Him? We must remember that it is not just that God loves, but that God **IS** love.¹⁰⁴¹ Love is one of the several attributes of the Most High that, taken together as one, tell us who God is in Himself. This moment is necessary because all of the psalmist's prayer life, and indeed his entire spiritual life depends on it. He needs not to just see the face of God but to experience it in the reassurance of His goodwill and in the blessing of continued fellowship with Him. He needs to experience the real presence of God's love

¹⁰⁴¹ 1st John 4:15 - 16 "Whosoever shall confess that Jesus is the Son of God, God dwelleth in him, and he in God. And we have known and believed the love that God hath to us. God is love; and he that dwelleth in love dwelleth in God, and God in him."

expressed in the smile of His mouth (☺ - pe). Perhaps this explains why the kiss is an almost universal expression of love. But this is more than just a longing for an expression of love. It is a plea for that which only the mouth of God can supply – life itself. “The words that I speak unto you, they are spirit, and they are life.”¹⁰⁴² What the psalmist senses the profound need of in this verse, “Look thou upon me, and be merciful unto me” is exactly what God has done in our lives. “For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.”¹⁰⁴³ Jesus, the Logos, the eternally begotten of the Father has been sent into the world as a demonstration that God is love. The question then is whether we trust His love (as my daughters trust mine) and call upon the name of the Lord. This calling is a universal truth not restricted to God’s ancient covenant people, “for there is no difference between the Jew and the Greek: for the same Lord over all is rich unto all that call upon him. For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved.”¹⁰⁴⁴ The answer to that call is not just a smile on a benign face. It is the ‘kiss’ of a loving God. It is nothing less than Spiritual CPR.¹⁰⁴⁵

Spiritual Direction

- ¹³² Look thou upon me, and be merciful unto me,
 As thou usest to do unto those that love thy name.
- ¹³³ Order my steps in thy word:
 And let not any iniquity have dominion over me.
- ¹³⁴ Deliver me from the oppression of man:
 So will I keep thy precepts.



The desperate moment of vulnerability in verse 132 is the prelude for the prayers that follow in 133 – 134 because it represents the psalmist’s awareness that his very life is utterly dependent on God. The mercy that he seeks in 132a is described more specifically in the prayers that follow which both speak of freedom, the first from an

¹⁰⁴² John 6:63 - 64 “It is the spirit that quickeneth; the flesh profiteth nothing: the words that I speak unto you, they are spirit, and they are life. But there are some of you that believe not. For Jesus knew from the beginning who they were that believed not, and who should betray him.”

¹⁰⁴³ John 3:16 – 21 For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life. For God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through him might be saved. He that believeth on him is not condemned: but he that believeth not is condemned already, because he hath not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God. And this is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil. For every one that doeth evil hateth the light, neither cometh to the light, lest his deeds should be reproved. But he that doeth truth cometh to the light, that his deeds may be made manifest, that they are wrought in God.

¹⁰⁴⁴ Romans 10:12 - 13

¹⁰⁴⁵ Genesis 2:7 “And the LORD God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul.” ... 1st Corinthians 15:45 “And so it is written, “The first man Adam was made a living soul; the last Adam (*i.e.* Jesus) was made a quickening spirit.”

internal enemy, indwelling sin; and the second from an external enemy, mankind. While he knows that he can take a next step, he realizes he will only be able to keep God's precepts if God orders the steps that he takes. Unless God shows him this mercy, iniquity will surely get the upper hand and have dominion over him, or man will succeed in oppressing him. He can take the next step, but without divine direction, it could be spiritually fatal.¹⁰⁴⁶

Here we might be tempted to ask if resorting to prayer masks irresponsibility on the psalmist's part? Is the psalmist substituting prayer for action? Many might think so because they have a different view of prayer. Certainly, they say, we can at least take the next step. Let us take the steps that we believe we can and then pray for the step we cannot take. Why pray for what is easy to do without God? Such a self-sufficient view, however, restricts the prayer life to a supplemental status, rather like the spare tire in your car. You use it when you need it. But it fails to recognize a basic truth about ourselves of which Jesus warns us. "Without me, you can do nothing."¹⁰⁴⁷ While God has given us the ability to take many kinds of 'next steps' on our own as evidences of our faith, that is not the issue here. It is the ordering of all the next steps one after another, the directing of all our steps, that concerns the psalmist. Prayers of petition usually address three aspects of our spiritual life: where we are, where we want to be, and how to get there. The psalmist knows where he is: utterly dependent on God. He knows where he wants to be: freely keeping 'thy precepts'. The psalmist also sees the dangers incipient in getting there: dominion of sin or oppression of man. What he doesn't know is how to direct his steps to avoid the dangers along the way and finally get to where he wants to be - in happy fellowship with God. The psalmist is giving prayer priority over action not substituting for it.

We might better understand this if we consider those who go out into the wilderness on long hikes. Those who view prayer as a secondary means to an end are like those who hike in the wilderness with map and compass, well clad and well shod, with abundant food and drink. They know at all times where they are and where they were going. They are always warm, well-fed and energetic. But it is not unheard of that such have died in the wilderness when they made a misstep and were unable to rescue themselves. Perhaps they broke a leg when they stepped on a mossy log and fell. Perhaps they slipped on a slanting rock and plunged into a raging torrent. They had all they thought they needed, but lacked an experienced guide to warn of a fatal step.

¹⁰⁴⁶ Ezekiel 18:4 "Behold, all souls are mine; as the soul of the father, so also the soul of the son is mine: the soul that sinneth, it shall die."

¹⁰⁴⁷ John 15:4 - 5 "Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine; no more can ye, except ye abide in me. I am the vine, ye are the branches: He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit: for without me ye can do nothing."

I remember one July in Switzerland when I was on a glacier and was so excited by the dazzling snow and ice that I started to dance on the icy surface. My guide, greatly alarmed, shouted STOP! He pointed to the slowly downward curving ice surface on my right that ended in a vast precipice. Suddenly I realized that if I slipped, I would slide uncontrollably and ever more rapidly down the curving incline to the precipice and my death. I froze in fear and slowly inched my way to safety using the ice pick that he had given me. Never dance on a glacier! Not a hundred yards further down the road, the lesson was tragically reinforced when we came on an emergency crew waiting glumly by their helicopter. Nearby a cloth shrouded body lay lifeless on the ground. A climber had fallen to his death off the side of the mountain presumably after taking one fatal misstep. In the spiritual life, death is never far away.

The psalmist knows that the spiritual life is more like traversing a glacier or a mountain or a mine-field than taking a walk in the park. One misstep could be fatal. He is not trying to avoid responsibility for his next step by substituting prayer for action. Rather he is giving prayer first priority before he takes action. The Prophet Jeremiah, for his part, commends the psalmist's wisdom in asking God to 'order my steps in thy word.' He cries out, "O LORD, I know that the way of man is not in himself: it is not in man that walketh to direct his steps. O LORD, correct me, but with judgment; not in thine anger, lest thou bring me to nothing"¹⁰⁴⁸ The writer of the proverbs similarly advises, "Trust in the LORD with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding. In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths."¹⁰⁴⁹

There is, of course, another facet of this view of the importance of prayer. Even with divine guidance, the possibility of a misstep remains and probably will happen. What then? The word translated "order" in this verse is כוּן (pronounced koon) is a primitive root word meaning properly to be erect or to cause to stand perpendicular. Hence it can mean establishing as one might establish or set up a company. But establishment and direction are closely linked. One who establishes a company may also by direct its steps. Wisdom in direction will further establish the financial stability of the company that was thus set up. In the case of missteps, the psalmist elsewhere reassures us that, "the steps of a good man are ordered (כוּן - or established) by the LORD: and he delighteth in his way. Though he fall, he shall not be utterly cast down: for the LORD upholdeth him with his hand."¹⁰⁵⁰ Again, we may understand this from the point of view of mountain climbers. Even experienced climbers hire guides for the mountains they plan to climb. But when they begin to climb, the guide and his charges are roped together, so that if one slips, the others will not suffer the fall to be fatal. Returning to the tragic lesson mentioned above, I assumed that the climber had been without a guide. None was in

¹⁰⁴⁸ Jeremiah 10:23 - 24

¹⁰⁴⁹ Proverbs 3:5 - 6

¹⁰⁵⁰ Psalm 37:23 - 24

sight. Certainly, however, there was no rope securing the unfortunate one against his fall. The prayer of verse 133 not only petitions for spiritual direction that relies on divine omniscience in the ordering of our every step; it also petitions for safety in spiritual direction that relies on divine omnipotence in mitigating the terrible consequences of our inevitable false steps and slips.

Finally, this prayer looks ahead to that relationship of which the Apostle Paul speaks: being led of the Spirit. "There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit. ... For if ye live after the flesh, ye shall die: but if ye through the Spirit do mortify the deeds of the body, ye shall live. For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God." ¹⁰⁵¹

Freedom from Oppression

¹³³ Order my steps in thy word:

And let not any iniquity have dominion over me.

¹³⁴ Deliver me from the oppression of man:

So will I keep thy precepts.



The two prayers in the passage before us are not unrelated. As noted, both have to do with freedom; the first: freedom from the internal domination of sin and the second: deliverance from the oppression of man. Their ordering suggests that the oppression of the individual by others is facilitated by the domination of sin within the individual. But how does such an interrelation come to be? The intent of these prayers suggests the answer to that question.

The intent of these prayers is that the psalmist be able to "keep thy precepts." Precepts have to do with the way in which we think about the application of statute law to specific situations in our lives; how we think about life and how we live it. The specific freedom that the psalmist is seeking is the freedom to think aright, according to the norms of godly thought, which includes both reason ¹⁰⁵² and faith ¹⁰⁵³. Sound cognition and faith both address the pursuit of truth because truth is the primary means by which the interior freedom sought is achieved. "And ye shall know the truth," says the Savior, "and the truth shall make you free."¹⁰⁵⁴ Both reason and faith are necessary in this pursuit because reason addresses those limited realities that are amenable or accessible to human cognition while faith apprehends those truths that transcend reason and are,

¹⁰⁵¹ Romans 8:1, 13 - 14

¹⁰⁵² Isaiah 1:18 "Come now, and let us reason together, saith the LORD: though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool."

¹⁰⁵³ Hebrews 11:6 "But without faith it is impossible to please him: for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him."

¹⁰⁵⁴ John 8:32

therefore, the subject of divine revelation. In either case the truth sought comes from God. It is “thy precepts” which the psalmist seeks to keep. And as God is one, so His truth must be coherent whether comprehensible by reason or apprehensible by faith. So, in the pursuit of truth, reason and faith are complimentary, not opposed.

If we reflect on our remarkable ability to think, we might be prone to believe that freedom of thought is inviolable. But these verses suggest otherwise. Since thought is generally the precursor to action, the dominion of iniquity that the psalmist fears, derives from the way he thinks and what he believes. Again, Jesus takes note of this. “Verily, verily, I say unto you, “Whosoever committeth sin is the servant of sin.”¹⁰⁵⁵ These two sayings of Jesus are part of a larger conversation¹⁰⁵⁶ between Himself and the Jews who gathered around Him, some of whom believed Him and others who did not. To those who believed, He addressed the first saying about the liberating effects of the truth, but with the others He engaged in a discourse that centered on freedom and identity. His detractors maintained that they were not in bondage but always free because of their descent from Abraham. Jesus explained that those who sin are the servants of sin and that their supposed freedom is not attested to by their actions of persecuting Him (with murderous intent) simply because He spoke the truth. Their sin argued their bondage as well as their spiritual ancestry to the devil who was “a liar, and the father of it.” This last observation links untruth (a lie) with sin (murder) and suggests that the maxim “the truth shall make you free” works both ways; as a positive principle of deliverance from bondage and as a negative principle of bondage begotten of untruth (a lie) via sin (murder). In short, a lie begets sin and sin begets bondage. This negative principle sheds light on the psalmist’s concern that iniquity should not have dominion over him. He knows that the iniquity which springs from believing an untruth (a lie) results in volitional bondage. This lies behind the first prayer, “let not any iniquity have dominion over me.” But sin is also relational and results in relational bondage. And this lies behind the second prayer, “Deliver me from the oppression of man.” When we sin, we sin against others, whether God or man. So, there is an element

¹⁰⁵⁵ John 8:34

¹⁰⁵⁶ The whole discourse is found in John 8:31 – 45: “Then said Jesus to those Jews which believed on him, If ye continue in my word, then are ye my disciples indeed; and ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free. They answered him, We be Abraham’s seed, and were never in bondage to any man: how sayest thou, Ye shall be made free? Jesus answered them, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Whosoever committeth sin is the servant of sin. And the servant abideth not in the house for ever: but the Son abideth ever. If the Son therefore shall make you free, ye shall be free indeed. I know that ye are Abraham’s seed; but ye seek to kill me, because my word hath no place in you.

I speak that which I have seen with my Father: and ye do that which ye have seen with your father. They answered and said unto him, Abraham is our father. Jesus saith unto them, If ye were Abraham’s children, ye would do the works of Abraham. But now ye seek to kill me, a man that hath told you the truth, which I have heard of God: this did not Abraham. Ye do the deeds of your father. Then said they to him, We be not born of fornication; we have one Father, even God. Jesus said unto them, If God were your Father, ye would love me: for I proceeded forth and came from God; neither came I of myself, but he sent me. Why do ye not understand my speech? even because ye cannot hear my word. Ye are of your father the devil, and the lusts of your father ye will do. He was a murderer from the beginning, and abode not in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaketh a lie, he speaketh of his own: for he is a liar, and the father of it. {of his own: or, from his own will or disposition} And because I tell you the truth, ye believe me not.

of attempted oppression of another nascent in sin. This attempt at oppression is linked to believing a lie because sin refuses to acknowledge the image of God in the person or group sinned against; it refuses the governance of God by denying His very existence (virtual atheism). This foundational denial of the image of God in man is seen in the dehumanization of the individual or group in the relationship in which the sin occurs. To borrow the relational construct of Martin Buber, the relationship is no longer 'I-Thou' but becomes 'I-it' as the inevitable consequence of sin. This explains the need to demonize certain groups of people in order to de-humanize them and to encourage thinking of them as 'sub-human' as part of a fallacious cognitive justification for oppression (or genocide) of one group of people by another group (i.e. believing a lie which leads to their murder or their enslavement).¹⁰⁵⁷

Both prayers are thus linked by this instrumentality of untruth which lies at the root of sin's domination and man's oppression. To acquiesce to their oppression of us, men must convince us of their lie. They must control our thinking, which explains the use of propaganda in oppressive governments (dictatorships) or institutions (slavery, dysfunctional families, toxic relationships). Believing the lie which allows sin to dominate us, impairs our ability to think clearly and facilitates believing the lie that allows others to oppress us. Before the will can be controlled (the oppression of men in 134) the mind must be enslaved (the dominion of iniquity in 133). Only the mercy of God can prevent either from happening to us.

The Glory of God

¹³² Look thou upon me, and be merciful unto me,
As thou usest to do unto those that love thy name.

...

¹³⁵ Make thy face to shine upon thy servant;
And teach me thy statutes.



This concluding verse (135) of the four verses preoccupied with prayer looks back to verse 132 that opened the section. As the opening prayer was for mercy, this closing prayer is for instruction. "Teach me thy statutes." It is a petition that suggests we can never get to the end of learning in God's 'classroom'- certainly not in this life, and perhaps never because God is boundless. But beyond the specific petitions for mercy and instruction, there is a relational petition that we see presented in verse 132 that carries forward to and is amplified by verse 135. "Look thou upon me ... as thou usest to do unto those that love thy name ... Make thy face to shine upon thy servant." What

¹⁰⁵⁷ The irony of this situation is that those who physically enslave others, morally enslave themselves. The one who murders another, destroys the very image of God in himself that he refuses to acknowledge in the one he murders. It is the paradox of the master being the slave, a slavery which he is at great lengths to deny just as did Jesus' detractors did in the discourse noted above.

the psalmist desires above all else is that his relationship with God should be favorable; that God would make His face to “shine” upon him. This desire for God’s favor lies at the heart of all prayer. The psalmist knows that of himself he can do nothing.¹⁰⁵⁸ Severed from life in God by sin’s domination, he will surely die.¹⁰⁵⁹ Though he knows that he can do nothing, he does not shift his responsibility for his part in achieving a harmonious relationship with God back to God. He knows that obtaining the knowledge of the truth that both liberates and delivers is his responsibility. But, though willing, he is totally dependent on God for spiritual direction and deliverance. Because he loves God, he desires to serve God. He is among “those that love thy name” and he is “thy servant.” Having only this desire but not any ability in himself that he can trust, he prays because he knows that all depends on God. Just as the prayers for direction (133) and deliverance (134) were interrelated through the critical role of truth, so the overarching prayers for mercy (132) and instruction (135) are interrelated. The instruction sought is a manifestation of God’s mercy toward the psalmist. The central role of truth is also a manifestation of mercy as we observed earlier. In short, the psalmist’s relationship with God is completely rooted in the mercy of God and not in any good thing that he can do of himself.

We might question why this is so. Certainly, one answer lies in the universal presence of sin and its crippling effects on humanity. “For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God ...”¹⁰⁶⁰ But there is another reason that is connected with the mercy of God: His glory. The Apostle Paul explains this to the Church at Ephesus.

*“But God, who is rich in mercy, for his great love wherewith he loved us, even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ, (by grace ye are saved;) and hath raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus: that in the ages to come he might shew the exceeding riches of his grace in his kindness toward us through Christ Jesus. For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast.”*¹⁰⁶¹

What this verse suggests is that there is a glory in the “exceeding riches of his grace” which is rooted in the riches of His mercy: the mercy sought by the psalmist and the mercy granted “in his kindness toward us through Christ Jesus.” The verse also makes clear that **the inception** of this intended demonstration of glory is in eternity past and that **the fulfillment** of the intended demonstration is “in the ages to come.” This is a plan that stretches from everlasting to everlasting. This explains why, although we are “saved by grace through faith,” during our lifetime, we were chosen “in him before the

¹⁰⁵⁸ John 15:5 “I am the vine, ye are the branches: He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit: for without me ye can do nothing.” {without me: or, severed from me}

¹⁰⁵⁹ Ezekiel 18:4 Behold, all souls are mine; as the soul of the father, so also the soul of the son is mine: the soul that sinneth, it shall die.

¹⁰⁶⁰ Romans 3:23

¹⁰⁶¹ Ephesians 2:4 - 9

foundation of the world. “¹⁰⁶² Nor is this plan dependent on the introduction of sin by the adversary. On the contrary, that tragic event (the spiritual fall of mankind) only greatly magnified the glory of His grace by revealing the limitless depths of His mercy in sending His eternally begotten Son to expiate our vast guilt on the Cross. “Where sin abounded, grace did much more abound. “¹⁰⁶³ There is, therefore, no room for boasting. The salvation sought by the psalmist (and all those who desire a happy and blessed relationship with God) is “not of works, lest any man should boast.” So, just as all is of God’s mercy, so all tends to His glory. “No flesh shall glory in His presence”¹⁰⁶⁴ Again, God tells the prophet Isaiah, “I will not give my glory unto another. “¹⁰⁶⁵

But we might ask, if all is of God’s mercy and all is for God’s glory, why does the psalmist trouble himself about his actions? If all depends upon God, why bother about anything? If we can do nothing, then why not let God do it for us? Prayer is not about such fatalistic pessimism. Our inability, notwithstanding, the spiritual life is not one of helpless inactivity. Over and over again we are told by explicit statements and by example that “the just shall live by faith.”¹⁰⁶⁶ The just live in active obedience by faith. Their faith is fulfilled by action.¹⁰⁶⁷ They do not just exist as passive fatalists. The life they live is according to the same principle as their salvation: by grace through faith. As we have been chosen in Christ Jesus before the foundation of the world that He might show forth the glory of his grace”, so we live by that very grace. Every act of life done by the grace of God redounds to His glory. And this lies at the very foundation of our existential purpose. The choice is not between activity and inactivity. The choice is between self-glorifying activity rooted in sin and God glorifying activity rooted in grace. It is the glory of God that the psalmist ultimately seeks and so should we. We please God when we live by His grace for His glory. And that requires prayer!

¹⁰⁶² Ephesians 1:4 “According as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love.”

¹⁰⁶³ Romans 5:18 – 21 “Therefore as by the offence of one judgment came upon all men to condemnation; even so by the righteousness of one the free gift came upon all men unto justification of life. For as by one man’s disobedience many were made sinners, so by the obedience of one shall many be made righteous. Moreover the law entered, that the offence might abound. But where sin abounded, grace did much more abound: That as sin hath reigned unto death, even so might grace reign through righteousness unto eternal life by Jesus Christ our Lord.”

¹⁰⁶⁴ 1 Corinthians 1:27 - 31 “But God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; and God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty; and base things of the world, and things which are despised, hath God chosen, yea, and things which are not, to bring to nought things that are: that no flesh should glory in his presence. But of him are ye in Christ Jesus, who of God is made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption: that, according as it is written, He that glorieth, let him glory in the Lord.”

¹⁰⁶⁵ Isaiah 48:9 -11 For my name’s sake will I defer mine anger, and for my praise will I refrain for thee, that I cut thee not off. Behold, I have refined thee, but not with silver; I have chosen thee in the furnace of affliction. {with...: or, for silver} For mine own sake, even for mine own sake, will I do it: for how should my name be polluted? and I will not give my glory unto another.

¹⁰⁶⁶ Habakkuk 2:4 Behold, his soul which is lifted up is not upright in him: but the just shall live by his faith.

Romans 1:17 For therein is the righteousness of God revealed from faith to faith: as it is written, The just shall live by faith.

Galatians 3:11 But that no man is justified by the law in the sight of God, it is evident: for, The just shall live by faith.

Hebrews 10:38 Now the just shall live by faith: but if any man draw back, my soul shall have no pleasure in him.

See also the entire eleventh chapter of Hebrews.

¹⁰⁶⁷ James 2:17 – 18 Even so faith, if it hath not works, is dead, being alone. {alone: Gr. by itself} Yea, a man may say, Thou hast faith, and I have works: shew me thy faith without thy works, and I will shew thee my faith by my works.

The Suffering Servant

^{129a} Thy testimonies are wonderful

...

¹³⁶ Rivers of waters run down mine eyes,
Because they keep not thy law.



How strange it must seem to the casual but observant reader, that this octave begins in such joy, as the psalmist exclaims, “Thy testimonies are wonderful” only to end in such sorrow, “Rivers of waters run down mine eyes, because they keep not thy law.” Even if we disregard the alphabetic necessity of the use of the word rivers (פֶּלֶג peleg - a rill or small channel of water) as an introductory word in the line in the octave where every line begins with פֶּ pe, we are still left with the paradox of sorrow in the face of joy. Of course, tears could signify the intensity of a very different emotion. When the psalmist thinks of those who have so abused him, the tears he refers could be tears of anger. But the context suggests the former – tears of sorrow. Had vengeful anger been in play, the prayer would have been imprecatory, not a petition for direction, deliverance and instruction. The psalmist has been praying to God, whom he loves (132b) and wants to serve (135a). So, his primary focus is on Him. How then such sorrow? To consider this, we should consider what it means to really serve.

Over and over in this psalm the psalmist has referred to himself as thy servant.¹⁰⁶⁸ Service requires that an individual be willing to align his individual will with that of the one whom he serves. But is this enough? If you had one who professed to serve you, but did so with a manifest spirit of recalcitrance, would you consider such a one truly a servant? Even if they did all that we said they should do, their resistant spirit would sour the sweetness of their service. Clearly the psalmist’s profession of his love for God, as testified to by his delight in God’s testimonies, is central to his acceptable service. There is every reason for him to pray that God would “Look thou upon me ... as thou usest to do unto those that love thy name ... Make thy face to shine upon thy servant.” God’s good favor of His servant rests not on mechanical obedience but on loving obedience. Acceptable service should be an expression of love of the master not just the love of the mammon of personal economic, political, or even eternal gain.¹⁰⁶⁹ But what then does this central affection suggest to us? It clearly suggests an alignment not only of the will but of the entire person: cognition: understanding the Master’s thoughts or precepts; volition: doing the Master’s will; and affection: feeling about things as the

¹⁰⁶⁸ 13 times - Psalm 119:17, 23, 38, 49, 65, 76, 84, 122, 124, 125, 135, 140, 176.

¹⁰⁶⁹ Luke 16:13 No servant can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon.

Master does. It is this last that is so critical here. The tears of the servant reveal the heart of his Master. The servant who grieves at those “who keep not thy law” is a faint reflection of the heart of God. The very people who have been so intent on speaking against him (23), who have forged a lie against him (69), and who persecute him wrongfully (84, 86), are those who are breaking the heart of God. God loves them ¹⁰⁷⁰, but they do not return His love. Their sin grieves the heart of God. As the Apostle Paul makes clear, “Love suffereth long ¹⁰⁷¹, and is kind.”¹⁰⁷²

The psalmist’s tears put us in mind of that familiar verse: “Jesus wept.”¹⁰⁷³ Seeing that Jesus would shortly affect the resurrection of His friend Lazarus from the dead, the question why did He weep is logically suggested. Why mourn for one who though dead shall live again in just a moment? Those who stood by Jesus observed, “Behold how he loved him!”¹⁰⁷⁴ Doubtless they were correct, but their perception of Jesus’ motivation, His empathy fell far short of the mark. Weep for a friend – yes. But to weep for an enemy, as the psalmist does here, defies human logic. Jesus tells His followers to “Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you.”¹⁰⁷⁵ Jesus wept not just for Lazarus. Lazarus’ death was an instance of that universal death, that separation from God, that characterizes all those who reject the love of God and persist in inveterate unbelief and sin. But it is not just the consequences of sin (death) that causes God ‘heartache’ but unrequited love. Although it has been asserted that God is impassible (i.e. not acted upon or affected by anything in creation) that is not to say that He is apathetic. “The God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, is not without feeling, not without the capability of loving and feeling the hurt of love spurned.”¹⁰⁷⁶

The servant suffers because God suffers with His creation. Jesus not only suffers for our sins on the cross (His penal or propitiatory suffering) but also for our coldness of heart toward Himself. We do not come readily to God as Light because His truth exposes our shame. We hide behind our figurative fig leaves and rationalize our shame at personal failure. We do not respond readily to God as Love, but run away from Him in our fallacious sense of self-sufficiency. So, Jesus suffers both for truth resisted and love unrequited. While His propitiatory sufferings for sin are unique to Him (only He could

¹⁰⁷⁰ John 3:16 For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth on him should not perish, but have eternal life.

¹⁰⁷¹ μακροθυμew makro-thumeo: to be long-spirited – objectively, forbearing, subjectively, patient

¹⁰⁷² 1 Corinthians 13:4a (ASV)

¹⁰⁷³ John 11:35. Which is the shortest verse in the English New Testament. Interestingly the shortest verse in the Greek New Testament is found in 1 Thessalonians 5:16: παντοτε χαιρετε (pantote cairete) - Rejoice evermore.

¹⁰⁷⁴ Joh 11:36

¹⁰⁷⁵ Matthew 5:43 – 45 “Ye have heard that it hath been said, thou shalt love thy neighbor, and hate thine enemy. But I say unto you, love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you; that ye may be the children of your Father which is in heaven: for He maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust.

¹⁰⁷⁶ The Evangelicals Dictionary of Theology Baker Press Ewell ed. Article on Impassibility

suffer for sin being essentially sinless – the just for the unjust¹⁰⁷⁷), His sufferings for truth and for love are exemplary and therefore open to all those who profess to be His servants.

Not that love for sinners in any way cancels the hatred the servant feels for sin itself. The psalmist has been quick to remind us that “I hate every false way” (104, 128); “I hate vain thoughts” (113); and “I hate and abhor lying” (164). The hatred the psalmist feels is directed against the instruments of bondage, not those who are bound by the fetters of sin. Today we would use the much worn but nevertheless adequate dictum: “God loves the sinner but hates the sin.”

To merely observe this fact, however, is inadequate. It is not that God desires us merely to understand Him, worthy and necessary as that is. Rather He would have us emulate, as much as humanly possible His noble example given to us in Jesus. To enter into Jesus’ exemplary sufferings because we love Him. In the end, we are called “Rejoice with them that do rejoice, and weep with them that weep.”¹⁰⁷⁸ While rejoicing with others without jealousy over their prosperity or advancement (for example) is possible, to weep for others is often quite difficult. But in that willingness to suffer and to weep for the sinner, that the quintessential test lies of whether we truly are “thy servants.”

¹⁰⁷⁷ 1Peter 3:18 “For Christ also hath once suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh, but quickened by the Spirit:”

¹⁰⁷⁸ Romans 12:15

ז (TZADDI)

☞ *The Righteousness of God's and His Testimonies* ☞

- 137 Righteous art thou, O LORD,
And upright are thy judgments.
138 Thy testimonies that thou hast commanded are righteous
And very faithful

☞ *The Psalmist's Zeal* ☞

- 139 *My zeal hath consumed me,*
Because mine enemies have forgotten thy words

☞ *The Purity of God* ☞

- 140 Thy word is very pure:
Therefore *thy servant loveth it.*

☞ *The Psalmist's State* ☞

- 141 *I am small and despised:*
Yet do not I forget thy precepts.

☞ *The Righteousness of God is Everlasting* ☞

- 142 Thy righteousness is an everlasting righteousness,
And thy law is the truth.

☞ *The Psalmist's Situation* ☞

- 143 *Trouble and anguish have taken hold on me:*
Yet thy commandments are my delights.

☞ *God's Testimonies are Everlasting because Righteous* ☞

- 144 The righteousness of thy testimonies is everlasting:
Give me understanding, and I shall live.

☞

ז - Tzaddi refers to righteousness or a righteous¹⁰⁷⁹ person. From פ pe – the mouth of God, we move to ז - tzaddi which implies the righteousness or fidelity of God. The connection between these octaves is obvious. The two halves of the first verse operate on the principle that the character of a person is revealed by what they say and what they do. Words and actions are the two witnesses which, when they agree, reveal the character of a person.¹⁰⁸⁰ Because God is righteous, His judgments are upright and His

¹⁰⁷⁹ The word translated righteous, צַדִּיק tsaddiyq (pronounced tsad-deek'), comes from a primitive root צַדַּק tsadaq (pronounced tsaw-dak') meaning to be causatively right or to make right in a moral or a forensic sense. Hence צַדִּיק - tsaddiyq means just, lawful, righteous (as a righteous man).

¹⁰⁸⁰ This principle arises from Old Testament Jurisprudence. Deuteronomy 19:15 "One witness shall not rise up against a man for any iniquity, or for any sin, in any sin that he sinneth: **at the mouth of two witnesses, or at the mouth of three witnesses, shall the matter be established.**" The principle of truth being established by more than one witness was used by both Jesus in Matthew 18:16

actions are faithful. Indeed, everything that comes from the mouth of God (עֵֿפֶֿ) is faithful or right and true (צַדִּיק – tzaddi). More than any other octave, these verses tell us about the righteousness of God¹⁰⁸¹ as revealed in His communications: “upright are thy judgments.” (137b); “Thy testimonies that thou hast commanded are righteous and very faithful” (138); “Thy righteousness is an everlasting righteousness, and thy law is the truth” (142); The righteousness of thy testimonies is everlasting (144a).” Righteousness is clearly a key to the blessedness which the psalmist seeks. “Blessed are the undefiled ...who walk in the law of the LORD.... that keep his testimonies, and that seek him with the whole heart.”

The first declaration of this octave establishes the absolute standard of righteousness. “Righteous art thou, O LORD, and upright are thy judgments.” In this view, God is not only the absolute standard of righteousness (“Righteous art thou, O LORD ...”) but the absolute authority (or judge) who determines who is righteous (“... and upright are thy judgments”). So, righteousness, while referring to human ethical or moral behavior in relationships, also refers to God’s judicial determinations about human behavior: His judgments and testimonies. Both judgments and testimonies, as part of a legal construct, reveal the righteousness of God (i.e. how God would behave were He to come among people and interact with them). They also serve as a guideline for people made in the image of God so that they can behave in a similar fashion. The former view (righteousness understood from a moral or ethical perspective) points to our Lord Jesus in His incarnation, the first and only truly righteous person. He fulfills the law because the law describes Him. The latter view (God’s judicial determinations about human behavior) supports the whole process of ethical reasoning that parallels the judicial

in the matter of adjudicating offenses between Christian brethren (“But if he will not hear thee, then take with thee one or two more, that in the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established.”) and also by Paul is dealing with the troublesome Corinthian church in 2 Corinthians 13:1 (“This is the third time I am coming to you. In the mouth of two or three witnesses shall every word be established.”)

¹⁰⁸¹ God’s holiness should not be confused with His righteousness. Holiness is the unique and overarching attribute of God, Himself. There is none Holy as God. (1 Samuel 2:2 **There is none holy as the LORD**: for there is none beside thee: neither is there any rock like our God. Revelation 15:4 Who shall not fear thee, O Lord, and glorify thy name? **For thou only art holy**; for all nations shall come and worship before thee; for thy judgments are made manifest.)

But there is a moral aspect of His Holiness that we are commanded to emulate: “Be ye holy for I am holy.” Leviticus 11:44 “For I am the LORD your God: ye shall therefore sanctify yourselves, and **ye shall be holy; for I am holy**: neither shall ye defile yourselves with any manner of creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth.” This is quoted by Peter, “Because it is written, Be ye holy; for I am holy.” 1 Peter 1:16 The righteousness of man is to flow out of this emulated holiness in the sense that holiness of human character should direct righteous interactions between people created in God’s image. Holiness tells us how we should be. Righteousness tells us how we should act. We can see this difference in the words chosen with regard to both holiness and righteousness. Peter quotes Leviticus “**Be ye holy; for I am holy**” (1 Peter 1:16) while Luke describes Zacharias and Elizabeth as “**righteous before God, walking in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord blameless.**” (Luke 1:6) Again, holiness has to do with our being (“be ye”), whereas righteousness has to do with our behavior (“walking”). The righteousness of the LORD’s actions are ‘co-erect’ with (or they are at right angles with, or square with) the ethical aspects of His holiness as revealed in His law. From our point of view as Christians, Jesus’ righteousness is imputed unto us (a judicial action). (See Psalm 32:2 “Blessed is the man unto whom the LORD imputeth not iniquity, and in whose spirit there is no guile.”) Experientially, however, His holiness is perfected in us by sanctification (as an ongoing process of grace). (See 2 Corinthians 7:1 “Having therefore these promises, dearly beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God.”)

system which rests on the commandments, the statutes, the precepts, the testimony, and finally the judgments of God, in short, the law (not primarily in its forensic sense) but in the sense of its use for the governance of human interactions. But these statements about the righteousness of God are more than just isolated statements. Starting with his declaration of God's righteousness, the psalmist presents a very basic syllogism.

Postulate A: Thy testimonies that thou hast commanded are righteous and very faithful (138)

Postulate B: Thy righteousness is an everlasting righteousness, and thy law is the truth. (142)

Conclusion C: (*because A and B are true - therefore*) The righteousness of thy testimonies is everlasting (144a)

What the psalmist is saying is this: the character of God defines the character of what He does. Because God is righteous, the judgments that He renders are therefore just and His testimonies are righteous also. And, because God is from everlasting to everlasting¹⁰⁸², it follows that His righteousness must be everlasting. Given this, it further follows that the righteousness of His testimonies must also be everlasting.¹⁰⁸³ Because a detractor might question the psalmist's assertions, he qualifies them in three ways, "Thy testimonies ... are righteous ... Thy word is very pure ... and thy law is the truth" (138a, 140a & 142b). The implication of "thy word is very pure" is not that it is an unadulterated word, but that it is a word that has been tried and found true in the furnace of personal affliction rather like a precious metal which is 'tried' by fire and found to contain no dross. In other words, the psalmist knows the truth of his assertions about the everlasting nature of God's testimonies because he has proved that truth experientially in the furnace of personal affliction. God's word in all its forms has stood the test of personal trial. Because his enemies had forgotten God's very pure words which the psalmist zealously loves, he is small in their eyes and despised by them (141a). Not only has his zeal for God's glory consumed him (139a), but trouble and anguish have taken hold on him (143a). Yet for all that, the psalmist does not forget God's precepts (141b), and God's commandments are his delight (143b).

The verses in this octave are also intensively personal. More than the other octaves, this one shifts back and forth continually between the psalmist's view of God and the psalmist's view of himself and his situation (shown in italics). Verses 137, 138, 140, 142, 144a focus on God and the characteristics of His utterances, while verses 139, 141, 143, and 144b focus respectively on the psalmist's zeal, despised smallness, his anguished

¹⁰⁸² Psalm 90:2 "Before the mountains were brought forth, or ever thou hadst formed the earth and the world, even from everlasting to everlasting, thou art God."

¹⁰⁸³ Of course, sound logic is no guarantee of truth. Only truth can beget truth. Logic merely helps us follow unerringly in the footsteps of truth. But the value of sound logic as a means of obtaining a life in God (i.e. everlasting life) is clearly suggested by the words of Isaiah 1:18, "Come now, and let us reason together, saith the LORD: though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool."

troubles, and his (ever present) need for instruction. But in presenting these many contrasts between God and his world, he not only affirms that God is the Light in his darkness, but also that it is incumbent on him to walk in that light of God's revealed presence. Zeal consumes him because enemies have forgotten God's words. (139) Love over comes him because God's words are pure. (140) Though small and despised by men, that is no excuse to forget God's precepts. (141) Though trouble and anguish take hold of him, he delights in God's commandments. (143) It is only through learning (and doing) God's testimonies that he shall live. (144)

Finally, this octave (at least in translation) begins with the word righteous and ends with the word life. Normally we tend to think of the two words as being linked as when we say, "This person is leading a righteous life." In that view, righteousness is a descriptor of a type of life, one among many. But this octave challenges such a notion by separating the two words. In this way, the psalmist invites us to see righteousness as a causal factor of life itself. It is as if the psalmist is telling us that righteousness equals life and unrighteousness equals death. Perhaps an illustration will clarify this point. There is an exit off a highway that I regularly take. Each time I take it, my mind goes back to an accident that occurred there. Two young people were traveling down the road at a great speed and decided at the last moment to take this particular exit. They did not realize that their car was out of control. That is, they were going too fast for the brakes to stop their car in a reasonable distance. Entering the exit curve at great speed, they were unable to slow or to turn the vehicle. They flew off the road, struck a large tree, and were killed instantly. Had they not turned off and continued down the road, they might have slowed the car, regained control, and lived. But they did not make the right choice. They were wrong – dead wrong. Righteousness implies an external standard (truth, law, or some unchanging standard) by which thoughts, words, or actions may be judged. In the case of the fatal accident, it was the fundamental and unalterable laws of physics that the driver unknowingly but unwisely tried to violate. Had the driver of the car made the right choice, the occupants would have lived.

This psalm (and indeed all of true living) is about a right relationship with God. And right relationship with God not only implies life but defines it. Hence after the psalmist's syllogism, his single plea (considering its elliptical references) may be read thus: "Give me understanding (of thy everlasting testimonies), and I shall live (everlastingly)." In short, the psalmist desires that above all, in living according to God's everlasting testimonies, the upright judgments of God will not find him wanting but that God's decision will be for the continuation of his life in God – forever.

Righteousness

- ¹³⁷ Righteous art thou, O LORD,
And upright are thy judgments.
¹³⁸ Thy testimonies that thou hast commanded are righteous
And very faithful.¹⁰⁸⁴



The first declaration of this octave establishes the frame work of righteousness. “Righteous art thou, O LORD, and upright are thy judgments.” The word translated righteous is צַדִּיק tsaddiyq, (pronounced tsad-deek'). It comes from a primitive root צַדַּק tsadaq, (pronounced tsaw-dak') which means to be causatively right or to make right in a moral or a forensic sense. Hence צַדִּיק tsaddiyq, means just, lawful, righteous (as a righteous man). These opening statements about the character of God are seen through the lens of relationship with Him. The Holiness of God, which what He is in Himself, is seen through the lens of relationship as His righteous dealings with the psalmist. (137a) His judgments or decisions about what actions to take in relation to the psalmist are according to His law. (137b) They are co-rect or ‘square’ perfectly with that law. Not only does God establish the covenantal relationship with the psalmist, but He sets the tone of that relationship (righteous) and maintains the priorities of the relationship (upright). His faithfulness and uprightness provide relational stability (continued uprightness) in the world of the psalmist where God’s word is forgotten (139b), where the psalmist is small and despised (141a), and where trouble and anguish have taken hold of him (143a). It is God alone who provides the psalmist the word which he loves (140), the precepts which he remembers (141), and the commandments which he delights in (143b). In short, God is the light in his darkness.

But to affirm that the LORD is righteous and that His judgments are upright goes far beyond describing the relationship that the psalmist has with God. That relationship is imperfect because it is plagued by sin and error. “O that my ways were directed to keep thy statutes! Then shall I not be ashamed, when I have respect unto all thy commandments. (*a lament over sin and failure*) I will praise thee with uprightness of heart, when I shall have learned thy righteous judgments. (*a confession of lack of knowledge*)”¹⁰⁸⁵ But here the psalmist (perhaps inadvertently) is describing the relationship that God has with Himself.¹⁰⁸⁶ Such an assertion argues that God’s relationship with Himself is

¹⁰⁸⁴ Goldingay translates these verses as: You are faithful, YHVH,
Upright in your decisions
You commanded the faithfulness of your decisions
And their truthfulness exceedingly.

¹⁰⁸⁵ Psalm 119:5 – 7

¹⁰⁸⁶ As Christians who hold to the doctrine of God’s tri-unity, God manifest in three persons but One in essence, we might also see in these verses an oblique reference to the eternal communion and counsels of the God-head, such as found in Genesis 1:26a, “And God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness ...”

always impeccable, coherent, and stable based on His Holiness, His Omniscience, and His Immutability. God is the psalmist's light because God is Light and in Him is no darkness at all.¹⁰⁸⁷

If we step back for a moment and reconsider the *imago dei* aspect of our creation, the law enters not primarily as a code of offenses and consequent punishments, but as guidance for the fulfilling that image of God role which we were given when God created us. That is why the essence of the law is relational along three 'axes': God, our neighbor, and our self. "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind ... and ... Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself."¹⁰⁸⁸ The law was intended to help us in our relationships with God, our neighbor, and ourselves. It described, in effect, how God would behave if He came among us as a human without ceasing to be God, i.e. it describes Jesus Christ. So, this first verse, in focusing however inadvertently on the internal relationship of the persons of the God-Head, incidentally challenges us, to focus how we relate to ourselves as human beings. Walking in the light of God's presence implies relating to ourselves in emulation of how God relates to Himself. And how we relate to ourselves will determine how we relate both to God and to our neighbor. The core of that self-relationship appears to be both Light and Love.¹⁰⁸⁹ We should live graciously according to the truth. But if we do not truly love ourselves and walk in truth, then we will do neither with regard to God or our neighbor. And that is the problem. Sin has crippled such an interior relationship and made it impossible. Woe to us!

Of course, such a view seems like a theological dead end until we realize that where the law failed in that it could not reverse the terrible internal consequences of sin; God, in sending his Son, Jesus, succeeded. "*For what the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh, God sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh: that the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit.*"¹⁰⁹⁰

¹⁰⁸⁷ 1 John 1:5 - 6 "This then is the message which we have heard of him, and declare unto you, that God is light, and in him is no darkness at all. If we say that we have fellowship with him, and walk in darkness, we lie, and do not the truth."

¹⁰⁸⁸ Matthew 22:37 - 39 Jesus said unto him, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself.

¹⁰⁸⁹ 1 John 4:7 - 8 Beloved, let us love one another: for love is of God; and every one that loveth is born of God, and knoweth God. He that loveth not knoweth not God; for God is love.

¹⁰⁹⁰ Romans 8:3 - 4

The Mysterious Friend

¹³⁷ Righteous art thou, O LORD,
And upright are thy judgments.

¹³⁸ Thy testimonies that thou hast commanded are righteous
And very faithful.



If the righteousness of God was demonstrated in the psalmist's mind by the uprightness of God's judgments, it is further evidenced by His testimonies. There is a difference between a judgment (משפט mishpat - a verdict) and a testimony (עדה `edah - a witness). The former reflects the role of an authority figure, a judge or an expert, while the latter reflects the role of an involved or interested party. In the judicial sense, they are related. Testimonies provide part of the basis for the application of the law to a particular situation so that the judgment will be upright and not be overturned by a higher court because of some defect in jurisprudence (i.e. the judgment be upright and will stay upright). Furthermore, in the judicial setting, the witness is 'commanded' to provide his or her testimony about the facts of the case as they understand them. The witness is further 'commanded' (and must so swear) that the evidence they are about to provide is faithful and true, which is the sense of the Hebrew words translated "righteous" and "faithful." How many of us have been asked to provide a recommendation for a person applying for a particular position? Such recommendations are, in effect, our testimony about their character and qualifications as we understand them. The reason such recommendations are usually requested involves their supporting role to better enable the requestor in making a correct judgment about hiring or admitting the applicant. Inevitably then, whether in a court of law or in an application, familiarity with the person or situation under consideration is central to being a witness, whereas familiarity with the law or job requirements is central to being a judge or an employer.

As noted above, this octave centers on the righteousness of God being a very real light for the psalmist in his otherwise morally dark world. It is about how the psalmist sees God in relationship with himself. While the "upright judgments" reflect a complete understanding of the law by God the law giver, the "righteous and very faithful" testimony reflects a complete understanding of the psalmist's situation by God the omnipresent witness. The former anticipates the truth that the apostle John tells us: 'God is Light', while the latter anticipates John's other great revelation: 'God is Love.'¹⁰⁹¹

¹⁰⁹¹ 1 John 1:5 - 6 "This then is the message which we have heard of him, and declare unto you, that **God is light**, and in him is no darkness at all. If we say that we have fellowship with him, and walk in darkness, we lie, and do not the truth."

1 John 4:7 - 8 Beloved, let us love one another: for love is of God; and every one that loveth is born of God, and knoweth God. He that loveth not knoweth not God; for **God is love**.

In short, the psalmist is telling us that righteousness does as righteousness is; how God is in Himself is how He behaves in relationship.

The psalmist knows that God is the omnipresent witness. In answer to the fallacious rationalization of the wicked who “slay the widow and the stranger, and murder the fatherless” saying, “The LORD shall not see”, the psalmist asks, “He that planted the ear, shall he not hear? He that formed the eye, shall he not see?”¹⁰⁹² Surely God has witnessed all the evil directed against the psalmist. “The eyes of the LORD are in every place, beholding the evil and the good.”¹⁰⁹³ But who can make Him testify? Who can make God do anything? The verse in hand answers that question. It is God, Himself, who “commands” His testimony, and it is God’s character that assures that His testimony is faithful and true. No one else can do this. But why should He testify? God testifies because His omnipresent witness is informed by His eternal love for His creation, and His righteousness involves not only truth but love. A righteous witness here is not only an observant witness but a loving one. God has a real interest in the sufferings of the righteous. “The eyes of the LORD are upon the righteous, and his ears are open unto their cry.”¹⁰⁹⁴

One might object that the question here is not ‘why will God testify’, but ‘against whom will God testify’? Is His motive for testifying His offended holiness and not His eternal love. Though righteous and very faithful, will He be for the defense (the psalmist against his adversaries) or for the prosecution (the holiness of God against the sinfulness of even the psalmist)? Were it the latter, surely the truth of God’s Holiness would utterly consume the psalmist along with all of sinful humanity. But Jeremiah reminds us, “It is of the LORD’S mercies that we are not consumed, because his compassions fail not.”¹⁰⁹⁵

While the figure of both the judge and the witness meet in God, Himself, it is not a law court that is in view here, but God’s relationship with His loving, though flawed servant, a servant to whom He has voluntarily and beneficently bound Himself in a covenantal relationship. The righteous and very faithful testimony of God, the witness, is not directed to God, the judge, so that He will render an upright judgment. Both the

¹⁰⁹² Psalm 94:6 - 9

⁶ They slay the widow and the stranger,
and murder the fatherless.

⁷ Yet they say, The LORD shall not see,
neither shall the God of Jacob regard it.

⁸ Understand, ye brutish among the people:
and ye fools, when will ye be wise?

⁹ He that planted the ear, shall he not hear?
he that formed the eye, shall he not see?

¹⁰⁹³ Proverbs 15:3

¹⁰⁹⁴ Psalm 34:15. The Apostle Peter quotes this very line when he writes, “For the eyes of the Lord are over the righteous, and his ears are open unto their prayers: but the face of the Lord is against them that do evil.” - 1Peter 3:12

¹⁰⁹⁵ Lamentations 3:22

upright judgment and the righteous and very faithful testimony are directed to the psalmist as evidences of God's love for him. It is more like a coach of a football team instructing the team-member in the right way to play the rough and tumble game (judgments) and the right tactics to use given the situation in which the player finds himself (testimony). What the psalmist is saying, then, is that relationally he can depend on God because He always gets it 'right.' These verses are not about judgment, though the terms have a judicial significance. They are about living and being led through life step by step by a loving and really interested Friend. One of the great lessons of life that I have learned is that one must be friendly in order to have friends. But there is another part to that truth, a mysterious part, because there is a friend that sticks closer than any brother.¹⁰⁹⁶ What the psalmist is telling us, is that he has found that mysterious Friend, and so can we.

Animosity: Zeal vs. Zeal

¹³⁹ My zeal hath consumed me,
Because mine enemies have forgotten thy words.

¹⁴⁰ Thy word is very pure:
Therefore, thy servant loveth it.



In this age, the word "zeal" has negative connotations, especially because of its connection with words like zealot. To many people a zealot is a person who is prone to violence (in the name of some political or social cause) and rationalization (which justifies such violence that otherwise would be totally unacceptable). Religious causes, Christian or otherwise, have often been used as bases for such criminal activity. So, to hear the psalmist assert, "My zeal hath consumed me, because mine enemies have forgotten thy words" is evocative of such concern. He speaks of both his zeal and his enemies in the same breath. For modern ears, such an assertion would almost certainly give cause for concern about what the psalmist intends to do next. Is this a prelude for violence?

It is amazing, then, that a messianic verse similar to this one ¹⁰⁹⁷ is what the disciples remember as they watch Jesus drive the money changers and sellers of sacrificial animals out of the court of the Gentiles. When Jesus takes such violent action (as

¹⁰⁹⁶ Proverbs 18:24 "A man that hath friends must shew himself friendly: and there is a friend that sticketh closer than a brother."

¹⁰⁹⁷ Psalm 69:9, "For the zeal of thine house hath eaten me up; and the reproaches of them that reproached thee are fallen upon me." See also John 2:13 – 17, "And the Jews' Passover was at hand, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem, and found in the temple those that sold oxen and sheep and doves, and the changers of money sitting. And when he had made a scourge of small cords, he drove them all out of the temple, and the sheep, and the oxen; and poured out the changers' money, and overthrew the tables; and said unto them that sold doves, 'Take these things hence; make not my Father's house an house of merchandise.' And his disciples remembered that it was written, "The zeal of thine house hath eaten me up."

recorded in the gospels), He quotes Isaiah, saying “Mine house shall be called an house of prayer for all people.”¹⁰⁹⁸

A few words of explanation may help here. The temple proper was for people born of Jewish parents. For a non-Jew to step inside the inner temple court meant death. Accordingly, there were inscribed blocks set up to warn the unwary Gentile not to approach the sacred court. But in Judaism, there was an ‘evangelical’ tone as well as a ‘sacerdotal’ one. God had intended His covenant people to be a witness to the Gentiles of His unique existence (their ‘gods’ are empty idols), His power, and His glory. In short, the Gentiles were to witness in Israel a worship that would encourage them to turn from their idols and to worship the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Accordingly, space was made in the temple compound for Gentile converts to Judaism so that, even though they might not go into the temple court proper, there was still room for them to draw near to God. Hence Isaiah’s proclamation: “The sons of the stranger, that join themselves to the LORD... them will I bring to my holy mountain, and make them joyful in my house of prayer.”¹⁰⁹⁹ But Israel had largely failed in this endeavor. The wider context of the story of the cleansing of the Temple makes this clear. On the next day after He cleansed it, as Jesus returned to the Temple, He passed a fig tree whose early fruit was not commercially profitable and was held to be a snack for any passerby. Hungry and coming to the tree, He found it barren, whereupon He cursed it. The disciples noted in amazement that the tree shortly died from the root up.¹¹⁰⁰ Israel had long been seen symbolically as a fig tree whose fruits of righteousness were desired of God. “The fruit of the righteous is a tree of life; and he that winneth souls is wise.”¹¹⁰¹ But Idolatrous Israel had not borne fruit and the court of the Gentiles was empty of the ‘sons of the stranger.’ And to cover their ‘evangelical’ failure they sought refuge by filling the court with ‘religious’ activity – the exchange of Roman coin for temple money and the sale of ‘approved’ sacrificial animals. They had, in the words of the Psalmist, “forgotten thy words”, but Jesus reminded them in a most graphic manner, as He quoted Isaiah.

¹⁰⁹⁸ Matthew 21:12 - 13 “And Jesus went into the temple of God, and cast out all them that sold and bought in the temple, and overthrew the tables of the moneychangers, and the seats of them that sold doves, and said unto them, It is written, ‘My house shall be called the house of prayer’; but ye have made it a den of thieves.” See also Mark 11:17 and Luke 19:46

¹⁰⁹⁹ Isaiah 56:6 - 7 “Also the sons of the stranger, that join themselves to the LORD, to serve him, and to love the name of the LORD, to be his servants, every one that keepeth the sabbath from polluting it, and taketh hold of my covenant; even them will I bring to my holy mountain, and make them joyful in my house of prayer: their burnt offerings and their sacrifices shall be accepted upon mine altar; for mine house shall be called an house of prayer for all people. The Lord GOD which gathereth the outcasts of Israel saith, ‘Yet will I gather others to him, beside those that are gathered unto him.’”

¹¹⁰⁰ Matthew 21:18 – 20 “Now in the morning as he returned into the city, he hungered. And when he saw a fig tree in the way, he came to it, and found nothing thereon, but leaves only, and said unto it, ‘Let no fruit grow on thee henceforward forever.’ And presently the fig tree withered away. And when the disciples saw it, they marveled, saying, How soon is the fig tree withered away!”

¹¹⁰¹ Proverbs 11:30 This idea of righteousness (צדקה - tzaddik or righteousness) being a kind of fruit also carries over into the New Testament in verses like 2 Corinthians 9:10 “Now he that ministereth seed to the sower both minister bread for your food, and multiply your seed sown, and increase the fruits of your righteousness” and Philippians 1:11 “Being filled with the fruits of righteousness, which are by Jesus Christ, unto the glory and praise of God.”

Both with the psalmist and with Jesus, we have been looking at one kind of zeal: the “zeal of the LORD.”¹¹⁰² But there is another kind of zeal, however, which the Apostle Paul knew quite well from experience. “Brethren, my heart's desire and prayer to God for Israel is, that they might be saved. For I bear them record that they have a zeal of God, but not according to knowledge. For they being ignorant of God's righteousness, and going about to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted themselves unto the righteousness of God.”¹¹⁰³ So we see in scripture that the zeal of the flesh and the zeal of the LORD are both connected with righteousness; the former with self-righteousness based on the word of the LORD ignored and forgotten, and the latter with the righteousness of the LORD based on the word of the LORD, believed and loved (140b). Thus, the verse in hand has real applicability to **ז** – tzaddi, the overtone of this octave, because the psalmist's zeal is a manifestation of his righteous relationship with God as God defines that relationship in His ‘very pure word’(140a). The zeal of ‘mine enemies’ (and God's enemies) is a manifestation of their hateful self-righteousness because they are trying to come to God on relational terms that they define even as they ignore and forget His words (139b).

What becomes increasingly obvious is the hostility between these two approaches to God, a hostility that inevitably involves suffering on the part of those who remember God's very pure word inflicted by those who forget His words. The psalmist is suffering for righteousness sake partly because it ‘consumes’ him. Such overwhelming emotions are hard to sustain. But he also suffers partly at the hands of the self-righteous. Jesus pronounces such suffering ‘blessed’¹¹⁰⁴ And Peter advises such to be happy and not afraid of self-righteous terror.¹¹⁰⁵

To further differentiate between these two kinds of zeal, consider the terms of engagement with the LORD. Referring again to John's two assertions: “God is love” and “God is light”,¹¹⁰⁶ we see Jesus “full of grace and truth.”¹¹⁰⁷ As He drives out the “thieves” from their “den”, He manifests a great love for the Gentile stranger who has been disenfranchised from access to His Father, and a hatred of the lie promulgated by the religious figures of His day that encouraged such wrong doing. Although He takes

¹¹⁰² See for example: Isaiah 9:7 “Of the increase of his government and peace there shall be no end, upon the throne of David, and upon his kingdom, to order it, and to establish it with judgment and with justice from henceforth even forever. The zeal of the LORD of hosts will perform this.”

¹¹⁰³ Romans 10:1 – 3

¹¹⁰⁴ Matthew 5:10 Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness' sake: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

¹¹⁰⁵ 1 Peter 3:14 – 17 But and if ye suffer for righteousness' sake, happy are ye: and be not afraid of their terror, neither be troubled; But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts: and be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you with meekness and fear: Having a good conscience; that, whereas they speak evil of you, as of evildoers, they may be ashamed that falsely accuse your good conversation in Christ. For it is better, if the will of God be so, that ye suffer for well doing, than for evil doing.

¹¹⁰⁶ 1 John 4:8 and 1:5 respectively

¹¹⁰⁷ John 1:14 And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth.

violent action, it is loving and based on truth. His suffering, which eventually follows in the wake is based on a persistent ignoring of the words of truth that He speaks and a hatred set on maintaining a power base among the very people the religious figures terrorized with their self-righteous zeal.

Tried in the Fire

¹³⁹ My zeal hath consumed me,
Because mine enemies have forgotten thy words.

¹⁴⁰ Thy word is very pure:
Therefore, thy servant loveth it.



The word translated “pure” (פָּרָה - pronounced tsaw-raf') is a primitive root meaning to fuse metal or to refine - literally or figuratively. The word occurs twenty-nine times in the Old Testament and is translated “goldsmith” five times, “founder” four times and “refiner” four times. It calls to mind the metallurgical process of smelting metal in order to remove dross. But whatever can the psalmist mean in speaking thus of God’s word? Is it possible that God’s word could contain dross that must be purged out? The answer is clearly no. But to advance such a negative answer cerebrally is trivial and pedantic. And the psalmist is anything but trivial or pedantic. So, what is he saying?

Refining implies a fire. To refine metal in the refiner’s fire is not unlike refining human character in the furnace of affliction.¹¹⁰⁸ If there is one thing that the psalmist has seen (and appreciated), it is the fire of affliction.¹¹⁰⁹ It was in those very afflictions that he relied on the word of God. “I am afflicted very much: quicken me, O LORD, according unto thy word.”¹¹¹⁰ While his enemies chose to forget God’s words and walk in the darkness of their ignorance and unbelief, the psalmist chose to walk in the light of the God’s word by faith. Given this understanding, the two verses in hand are a kind of spiritual *chiaroscuro*. The diametrically opposed choices that the psalmist and his enemies make, create the animosity under which he suffers. In choosing to believe God’s word as true, he suffers for that truth at the very hands of those who reject it. His assertion about the purity of God’s word is not a cerebral assent. It is experiential. He has clung to the hope and trustworthiness of God’s word and promises in the fires of his affliction. Not only his faith has been tried as metal in a refiner’s fire ¹¹¹¹, but also

¹¹⁰⁸ Malachi 3:2 “But who may abide the day of his coming? And who shall stand when he appeareth? For he is like a refiner’s fire, and like fullers’ soap:”

¹¹⁰⁹ Ps 119:67 Before I was afflicted I went astray: but now have I kept thy word. Ps 119:71 It is good for me that I have been afflicted; that I might learn thy statutes. Ps 119:75 I know, O LORD, that thy judgments are right (or righteousness), and that thou in faithfulness hast afflicted me.

¹¹¹⁰ Psalm 119:107

¹¹¹¹ Peter in a circular letter to young believers undergoing trials encouraged them to persevere. He wrote that they who “... are kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation ready to be revealed in the last time. Wherein ye greatly rejoice, though now for a

God's word that he carries with him in faith has been tried and found to be undiminished. God has not failed to honor His word, even in the most difficult of circumstances. The word of God, along with the psalmist's faith, was subjected the fires of personal affliction, and found to be without dross. No wonder the psalmist says "Thy word is very pure" and, by implication very precious, to him - more precious than pure gold.¹¹¹² He loves the word of God because it has supported his soul in the most difficult of situations and been proved true in his experience.

We may perhaps better understand this situation if we introduce the notion of the skeptic, one who asks if God's word is completely true and trustworthy. For such a one, it is the word alone that must be subject to some sort of test to demonstrate its 'purity'. Their mind-set is: "unless I see the purity of God's word demonstrated to my satisfaction, I will not believe it." Such a view is not unlike that which Satan (the adversary) foisted on Eve (and through her Adam) saying: "Ye shall not surely die..."¹¹¹³. Satan played the role of the skeptic when he tempted Jesus ¹¹¹⁴ saying: "If thou be the Son of God, cast thyself down: for it is written, He shall give his angels charge concerning thee: and in their hands, they shall bear thee up, lest at any time thou dash thy foot against a stone."¹¹¹⁵ He was saying, in effect, 'Here is a promise. Let's put it to the test. Let's see if God's word is really true.' Jesus replied simply "Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God." Why then does the skeptic fail to see the demonstration of the purity of God's word which the psalmist does?

The skeptic fails to see the demonstration of purity of the word God gave us because He gave us His word to be trusted not tested. He gave it to us much like captain gives a life preserver to a drowning man. A drowning man is very different than an inspector of nautical safety equipment. The drowning man may be choked with water but the more he is submerged the more he clings in desperation to the life preserver. The inspector of nautical safety equipment holds the preserver at arm's length and pronounces it "safe." But the drowning man can testify that this life preserver saved his life. The psalmist's enemies are skeptics. The psalmist is a believer. And the word of God inevitably creates such divisions. Jesus tells His followers, "Think not that I am come to send peace on earth: I came not to send peace, but a sword. For I am come to set a man at variance against his father, and the daughter against her mother, and the daughter in law against

season, if need be, ye are in heaviness through manifold temptations: that the trial of your faith, being much more precious than of gold that perishes, though it be tried with fire, might be found unto praise and honor and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ..." (1Peter 1:5-7)

¹¹¹² Psalm 119:72 "The law of thy mouth is better unto me than thousands of gold and silver." We see a similar contrast between the treatment of God's word by the wicked and the psalmist's evaluation of its worth in Psalm 119:126b -127 ...they have made void thy law. Therefore, I love thy commandments above gold; yea, above fine gold.

¹¹¹³ Genesis 3:4b

¹¹¹⁴ The account is in Matthew 4:3-7

¹¹¹⁵ Satan quoted Psalm 91:10 - 12 "There shall no evil befall thee, neither shall any plague come nigh thy dwelling. For he shall give his angels charge over thee, to keep thee in all thy ways. They shall bear thee up in their hands, lest thou dash thy foot against a stone."

her mother in law. And a man's foes shall be they of his own household."¹¹¹⁶ The differing responses to God's word divides humanity into skeptics and believers, and creates the very hostility that it was given to the believer to be able to withstand. Inevitably, then, the word of God goes with the believer through those fires that were designed to try his faith to refine it of dross. But, in so doing, that word has been proved again and again by those who have trusted it, even those who have experienced trials because of it, to be undiminished and without dross.

But what of the skeptics, standing on the sideline speculating abstractly and distantly about the value of the word of God. What witness do they have? Their witness lies in the very lives of those whom they afflict. Not only do these cling to the word that has occasioned such trial in their lives even as it sustains them, but they actually love it and prize it far above gold. This is the final mystery for the skeptic. How can it be, they reflect, that these who lose their lives for the sake of the Gospel, rejoice as though they found their lives? It is because the very word they love assures them that "he that loseth his life for my sake shall find it."¹¹¹⁷ It is this word that allows them to overcome the world. No wonder they can say, "Thy word is very pure: therefore, thy servant loveth it."

Glory to God

¹³⁹ My zeal hath consumed me,
Because mine enemies have forgotten thy words.

...

¹⁴¹ I am small and despised:
Yet do not I forget thy precepts.



Here is another contrast between the psalmist and his enemies. The psalmist's enemies forget (i.e. ignore) God's words whereas he does not. This seems like a pretty simple contrast, but there is much more than mere remembrance involved. The psalmist's remembrance is cast against the position that he has in human society. He is "small and despised." But what does this social standing (or lack of it) have to do with whether or not the psalmist remembers God's precepts? In the Scriptures, there is a theme that external circumstances have the potential of being a barometer of a right or righteous (צ – tzaddi) relationship with God. "The LORD maketh poor, and maketh rich: he bringeth low, and lifteth up. He raiseth up the poor out of the dust, and lifteth up the beggar from the dunghill, to set them among princes, and to make them inherit the

¹¹¹⁶ Matthew 10:34 - 36

¹¹¹⁷ Matthew 10:39 He that findeth his life shall lose it: and he that loseth his life for my sake shall find it.

throne of glory: for the pillars of the earth are the LORD'S, and he hath set the world upon them."¹¹¹⁸ "When a man's ways please the LORD, he maketh even his enemies to be at peace with him."¹¹¹⁹ Given verses like these, one might be tempted to assume that obedience to the LORD should result in temporal promotion. Certainly, there have been cases like this. But God does not deal with all men in exactly the same fashion. In the great chapter on faith ¹¹²⁰ we read of those who "quenched the violence of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, out of weakness were made strong, waxed valiant in fight, turned to flight the armies of the aliens." But we also read of those who "had trial of cruel mockings and scourgings, yea, moreover of bonds and imprisonment: They were stoned, they were sawn asunder, were tempted, were slain with the sword: they wandered about in sheepskins and goatskins; being destitute, afflicted, tormented; (Of whom the world was not worthy:) they wandered in deserts, and in mountains, and in dens and caves of the earth." Yet we read, finally, "these all, having obtained a good report through faith, received not the promise, God having provided some better thing for us, that they without us should not be made perfect." Whether or not the sword claimed their life, whether or not wealth or poverty followed them all their days, they ALL obtained a good report through faith. But the receipt of the promise was waiting for us. We complete their story.

I suppose that many a believer, foolishly supposing that service is gain, will have been sorely disappointed by the God who works all things after the counsel of his own will. ¹¹²¹ But the psalmist was not among such. His service to God, his remembrance of His precepts was not based on any hope of material advancement or social success. Rather, his lot had no bearing on his devotion to the LORD. As we noted in the previous verse, the psalmist had demonstrated to his great satisfaction the purity, dependability, and precious soul-sustaining value of that Word in the fires of personal affliction. How could he, then, ever forget how God thinks about his life and experience? In short, what the psalmist is telling us is that his relationship with God (and, indeed, any right relationship with God) is not a *quid pro quo* relationship. Over and over again, we have seen in this psalm that the psalmist promises to do something if God does something. He promises to do something not as an inducement to get God to do what he wants Him to do (manipulation), but as a testimony that whatever he says he will do will be

¹¹¹⁸ 1 Samuel 2:7 - 8

¹¹¹⁹ Proverbs 16:7

¹¹²⁰ Hebrews 11:34 - 40

¹¹²¹ Ephesians 1:9 - 12 Having made known unto us the mystery of his will, according to his good pleasure which he hath purposed in himself: That in the dispensation of the fulness of times he might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven, and which are on earth; even in him: In whom also we have obtained an inheritance, being predestinated according to the purpose of him who worketh all things after the counsel of his own will: That we should be to the praise of his glory, who first trusted in Christ.

the inevitable consequence of God's actions on his behalf (dependency). The corollary being, of course, that without God the psalmist knows that he can do nothing.¹¹²²

But the passage in Hebrews (quoted above) suggests more than the lack of social or economic standing having no bearing on the psalmist's devotion to God. God's dealings with the psalmist and his ongoing devotion to God's precepts extends well beyond this particular relationship. We have an interest in what the psalmist is suffering. The psalmist's being "small and despised" has meaning for our spiritual lives. In speaking to the Corinthian believers,¹¹²³ the Apostle Paul takes note of their social standing as the psalmist does of his. "Ye see your calling, brethren, how that not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called:..." Many in Corinth, like the psalmist, were 'small and despised.' But there was a reason for this. "God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; and God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty; and base things of the world, and things which are despised, hath God chosen, yea, and things which are not, to bring to nought things that are ..." Taking this view of things back to the psalmist's situation, we can see that the smallness and despised-ness of the psalmist has reference back to those who have provoked him by ignoring the very word he holds dear. God has chosen the psalmist in his marginalized state to confound and bring to nought those who so self-confidently neglect His word. The psalmist's marginalized estate, then, serves God's purpose. The Apostle affirms this directly for the Corinthian believers, and indirectly for the psalmist and for us. Marginalization is one means of denying humanity any basis to glory in His presence. "God hath chosen the foolish things of the world... the weak things of the world ... base things of the world, and things which are despised, ...that no flesh should glory in his presence."

What this last assertion suggests is that lying behind the enemy's attitude toward the word of God (ignoring His words as opposed to remembering His precepts) is pride and self-glorification. The psalmist has no real basis for glory because he is "small and despised." In his nothingness, he is willing to have his thought processes led of God, whereas his enemies are so proud and self-confident that they feel they can do without the LORD's precepts, and say (in effect): 'We can do very well without God telling us how to think and what to do – thank-you very much!' So people like the psalmist, in the words of the Apostle, are chosen precisely because their devotion to God in their marginalized state is useful to "confound the wise"... to "confound the things which are mighty" ... and to "bring to nought things that are." When men do not try to exploit the Almighty, but are willing to humbly and faithfully serve Him in the state that He

¹¹²² John 15:4 – 5 "Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine; no more can ye, except ye abide in me. I am the vine, ye are the branches: He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit: for without me ye can do nothing."

¹¹²³ 1 Corinthians 1:26 - 29

chooses for them,¹¹²⁴ then He finds a human with whom He can undo the great and mighty, bring shame to the proud, and gather glory to His name.

The Everlasting Word

¹³⁷ Righteous art thou, O LORD,
and upright are thy judgments.

...

¹⁴² Thy righteousness is an everlasting righteousness,
and thy law is the truth.

...

¹⁴⁴ The righteousness of thy testimonies is everlasting:



Verse 142 presents the middle assertion of a somewhat difficult syllogism¹¹²⁵ that underlies this octave which has to do with God's righteousness (צ tzaddi). The first assertion is that God's righteousness is reflected by His "upright judgments" (i.e. His judgments are always correct because they are always "upright" or in accordance with His law which defines the nature of righteousness). Verse 142 sets forth a second argument in two parts that builds on the assertion of verse 137. First the psalmist argues that the aforementioned righteousness is an everlasting righteousness. He demonstrates the validity of this assertion in the second half of the verse. He affirms that God's law is an articulation of Truth (the sense of absolute truth being implied). "Thy law is the truth." But the nature of absolute truth is defined by its immutability and therefore its everlasting nature. If absolute truth does not change then it cannot cease to exist because ceasing to exist is a change and would imply that it was not truth to begin with. The psalmist holds that absolute truth is both immutable and everlasting. But he has already stated, God's judgments are always in accordance with the Law ("Upright are thy judgments." 137b) which is truth ("thy law is the truth." 142b). Therefore, as the upright judgments must be revelatory of the God who rendered them, the psalmist concludes that not only is God righteous (137a) but that His righteousness must be

¹¹²⁴ 1 Corinthians 7:17, 20 - 24 But as God hath distributed to every man, as the Lord hath called every one, so let him walk. And so ordain I in all churches. ... Let every man abide in the same calling wherein he was called. Art thou called being a servant? Care not for it: but if thou mayest be made free, use it rather. For he that is called in the Lord, being a servant, is the Lord's freeman: Likewise also he that is called, being free, is Christ's servant. Ye are bought with a price; be not ye the servants of men. Brethren, let every man, wherein he is called, therein abide with God.

¹¹²⁵ A syllogism is a form of reasoning in which a conclusion is drawn (validly or invalidly) from two given or assumed propositions or premises each of which shares a term with the conclusion, and share a common of middle term not present in the conclusion. (e.g. all dogs are animals; all animals have four legs; therefore, all dogs have four legs.) What makes the syllogism more difficult in this passage is the successive use of different terms for God's spoken word: "judgments" in the first proposition, "law" in the second proposition, and finally "testimonies" in the conclusion. But if we remember that judgments, law, and testimonies (though different) all share a common revelatory aspect of God's righteousness as words that He utters, then the argument becomes more apparent. In this case the syllogism is roughly: The LORD's word reveals His righteousness; His righteousness is everlasting righteousness; therefore, His word is everlasting.

everlasting (142a) because His judgments are always in accord with His law which is Truth and which is itself immutable and everlasting.

The third part of the argument continues in verse 144. If the judgements of God (being always according to His law) reveal His righteousness and the Law of God (which is Truth) reveals the everlasting nature of His righteousness, then it follows that the testimonies of God which are also revelatory of His righteousness (“Thy testimonies that thou hast commanded are righteous and very faithful.” 138) must in themselves be everlasting. So, the psalmist concludes that not only is God’s righteousness everlasting, but that His testimonies are as well: (“The righteousness of thy testimonies is everlasting.” 144a).

But why is this argument important to the psalmist and to us? The psalmist makes two statements about his situation among men who are inimical to God’s word. “I am small and despised” (141a) and “trouble and anguish have taken hold on me.” (143a) We might say that he feels marginalized and vulnerable. In such times of trial or suffering, humans inevitably experience the emotional need to be loved, to have hope, to be encouraged, to gain insight. Just as the satisfaction of physical needs for life and personal safety sustains the body; so too the stable satisfaction of these and myriad other emotional needs sustains the life of the soul.¹¹²⁶ Normally we look to other people to meet these emotional and physical needs, especially if our own internal resources are diminished. But in the environment in which the psalmist finds himself, such support will not be forthcoming from the hostile community around him. Finding nothing within himself, he has been forced to rely on God’s spoken word and found (as we observed in an earlier lesson) that the word is undiminished by the fires of affliction through which he has already passed. The everlasting nature of God’s word, then becomes critical for him for similar reasons. No form of adversity can exhaust its staying power. It simply goes on forever encouraging, giving hope, providing critical insight, and therefore stability of soul-support when all other sources have failed. The fire of affliction cannot consume the word, nor can trouble and anguish cause its fidelity to cease. For the psalmist, the word thus characterized as everlasting is Divine utterance, but for the Christian, the Word is a Person – the second person of the Trinity; the *λογος* of John’s gospel. “God, who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets, hath in these last days spoken unto us by *his* Son, whom he hath appointed heir of all things, by whom also he made the worlds...”¹¹²⁷ And just as the psalmist elsewhere affirmed: “Before the mountains were brought forth, or ever thou hadst formed the earth and the world, even from everlasting to everlasting, thou art God”¹¹²⁸ so too the Christian can sing:

¹¹²⁶ Proverbs 18:14 The spirit of a man will sustain his infirmity; but a wounded spirit who can bear?

¹¹²⁷ Hebrews 1:1-2

¹¹²⁸ Psalm 90:2

“Thou art the everlasting Word
The Father’s only Son;
God manifestly seen and heard;
And Heav’n’s beloved one:

In Thee most perfectly expressed
The Father’s glories shine
Of the full deity possessed
Eternally divine.

True image of the Infinite,
Whose essence is concealed;
Brightness of uncreated light;
The heart of God revealed”¹¹²⁹

If therefore the psalmist was so comforted by the purity and eternal security of God’s spoken word, how much more should we be comforted by the Eternal Word who has not only shown us the heart of God but who was, Himself, “despised and rejected of men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief ... he was despised, and we esteemed him not, (but) surely he hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows.”

Triumphant Love

¹⁴³ Trouble and anguish have taken hold on me:
Yet thy commandments are my delights.



We have a common expression that describes difficult circumstances. We say, “I am caught between a rock and a hard place.” That is, in part, what the psalmist is telling us in verse 143a. But he goes beyond such a description to add a note of deliberateness and malevolence. Trouble and anguish are like two enemies that have been stalking the psalmist’s soul and now they have found him. Such is the sense of the word translated “taken hold”. **מָצָא** (pronounced maw-tsaw') is a primitive root meaning, properly, to come forth to or appear but transitively, to find or acquire. (Latin Vulgate: *invenerunt me* – have found me). It is not that he has accidentally stumbled in-between the rock and the hard place. Rather, he tells us that they have been actively seeking to apprehend him, to lay hold upon him.

There are two forces at work here: trouble and anguish. Trouble is **צָר** (pronounced tsar) and comes from **צָרַר** (pronounced tsaw-rar') a primitive root meaning to cramp. Hence **צָר** means narrow or, as a noun, a tight place. Anguish is **מָצוּק** (pronounced maw-tsoke')

¹¹²⁹ Josiah Conder 1789 – 1855

and comes from צוק (pronounced tsook) a primitive root meaning to compress or, figuratively, to oppress or distress. Hence, מצוק also conveys the sense of a narrow place both abstractly and figuratively. The difference between the two is that trouble has the sense of being external to the psalmist; whereas, anguish refers to an interior, affective state. The two may or may not be related. The hostile attitude of those “enemies *who* have forgotten thy words” 139b are probably the source of the troubles. Mere happenstance may also be in play. “Although affliction cometh not forth of the dust, neither doth trouble spring out of the ground; yet man is born unto trouble, as the sparks fly upward.”¹¹³⁰ Anguish, on the other hand, can arise as a response to external trouble or from our own inward sense of failure, impotence, vulnerability, sinfulness, and a host of other states of awareness that are all very real. It can also arise from Divine silence. “My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me? Why art thou so far from helping me, and from the words of my roaring?”¹¹³¹

The combination of these two forces of exert a constraint on the affective response of the psalmist. Such circumstances invite the psalmist (and us) to “curse God, and die” as Job’s wife urged him.¹¹³² As a minimum, there is the inevitable temptation to doubt God and complain bitterly to Him. But the psalmist does neither. “Yet (*i.e. even now when all these things are happening to me*) thy commandments are my delights.” How is it possible for him to respond this way? How is it possible that Job should bless God even in the worst of adversity? ¹¹³³

There is a mystery about situations like those of the psalmist or of Job. They are common enough, and men often react emotionally as the situation dictates. But some do not. They do not react because they see the situation differently than their eyes would tell them. They see not constraint, but opportunity. They see not a straight place, but a wide-open place, where there are options for their response that run counter to bemoaning and complaint; counter to bitterness and cursing that the circumstances dictate. It is Jesus, Himself, who counsels us to take such a different view. “Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness’ sake: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake. Rejoice, and be exceeding glad: for great is your

¹¹³⁰ Job 5:6 - 7 The word translated “trouble” in this verse in Job is עמל (pronounced aw-mawl’) meaning toil or wearing effort; hence, worry, whether of body or mind. The concept is similar to צר (pronounced tsar) but without malevolence. Job is telling us that trouble happens, but some troubles come because of man’s antithetical nature relative to God and to His people. It may be the psalmist is not referring to this common lot of humanity in verse 143a, but rather the hostility that he has been experiencing throughout this psalm. Nevertheless, in human experience, it is sometimes hard to distinguish between the two.

¹¹³¹ Psalm 22:1

¹¹³² Job 2:9

¹¹³³ Job 1:20 – 22 “Then Job arose, and rent his mantle, and shaved his head, and fell down upon the ground, and worshipped And said, Naked came I out of my mother’s womb, and naked shall I return thither: the LORD gave, and the LORD hath taken away; blessed be the name of the LORD. In all this Job sinned not, nor charged God foolishly.

reward in heaven: for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you.”¹¹³⁴ Remember, the blessedness of which Jesus speaks here, μακαριος (mak-ar'-ee-os), means supremely blessed or happy and is the equivalent of the desire that underlies this psalm: שֵׂשׁ (eh'-sher) is the interjection, O how happy! How blessed.¹¹³⁵

The psalmist sees things differently than we would suspect. This is not whistling a happy tune in the dark so that you will not be afraid. This is not putting on a brave front to impress God and somehow get Him to act. It is a genuine revelation of the inner life of the psalmist. Perhaps a simple illustration will suffice. Fifty years ago, when local towns sponsored community “clean-ups”, my brother and I would go around and look over scrap metal that was being thrown out.¹¹³⁶ When we found a piece of metal, we had to determine if it was real brass (that had scrap value) or brass plated iron (that had no scrap value). Accordingly, we took a sharp object (a knife or a screw driver) and scratched the surface. If it glowed yellow in the light it was brass. If it glowed silver, it was iron. In dubious cases, a magnet also helped our primitive metallurgical evaluations.

The pincer-like cooperation of trouble and anguish are not unlike the knife that we used to scrape away corrosion to determine the exact nature of the metal we were dealing with. The response, “Yet thy commandments are my delights” is like seeing the true character of the metal thus tried. In our humble case, it was brass that we were seeking. Here it is pure gold that God beholds! It is important to realize that there is nothing that any of us can do to court God’s favor. He has always loved us because He is love. He has paid the price of that insuperable benevolence, on the Cross. But in loving us, He has every right to expect us to return that love. The Apostle John says so simply, “We love him, because he first loved us.”¹¹³⁷ And here we have the evidence of a soul that truly loves God, despite the circumstances that would tempt him to doubt, complain, or curse. Instead he says I continue to take great delight in your commandments ... (leaving us to make the inference) ... *because I love you*. It is in loving Him that we seek to please Him, and understanding His directions, His commandments, is central to understanding the way that love can be expressed. Here is no legalist seeking to manipulate God by recalcitrantly doing what God has commanded. Here is a soul that knows that he is loved of God despite the darkness of the situation and wants to return that love. Here is a soul that spontaneously rejoices in the discovery of the way of love. Here is more than love tried in the vice of trouble and anguish. Here is love insuperable and triumphant!

¹¹³⁴ Matthew 5:10 - 12

¹¹³⁵ Psalm 119:1 – 2 “Blessed are the undefiled in the way, who walk in the law of the LORD. Blessed are they that keep his testimonies, and that seek him with the whole heart.

¹¹³⁶ This may not have been legal. I am still not sure but there were many others similarly engaged and no one seemed to mind. In any case the statute of limitations for such questionable activities has run out.

¹¹³⁷ 1 John 4:19

Everlasting Life

¹⁴³ Trouble and anguish have taken hold on me:
Yet thy commandments are my delights.

¹⁴⁴ The righteousness of thy testimonies is everlasting:
Give me understanding, and I shall live.



We have already seen that 144a is the conclusion of a syllogism that runs, roughly:

1. The Lord is righteous (137a) and His judgments reveal that righteousness (137b)
2. The LORD's righteousness is everlasting (142a), because His Law, which is Truth and immutable, is everlasting (143b)
3. Therefore, the righteousness of His testimonies, which are involved in His righteous judgments and according to His immutable law (Truth), must also be everlasting (144a)

We have also seen that the psalmist truly loves the LORD otherwise his response when trouble and anguish, apprehend him would be bitterness, complaint, distrust, and even cursing. Confusion is the stepchild of trouble and anguish, but the hallmark of love is trust. Confusion over circumstances cannot set the love of God at naught. In his love for God, the psalmist deals with confusion over God's actions by desiring to understand of His way. Trusting God's love, wisdom, and power, the psalmist does not question His actions but seeks to understand His intents.¹¹³⁸ He asks not "Why have you done this to me?" (which would accord with the advice of Job's wife, "Curse God and die"¹¹³⁹), rather he asks God "Give me understanding, and I shall live."

This plea, however, begs two questions: what is it the psalmist wants to understand and why does such understanding result in life. The former is perhaps easier to grasp, since for the psalmist (and the scriptures) life is not just about the continuation of physical existence, the preserving of the union of the immaterial parts of our being (our spirit and soul) with the material part (our body). Life is about continued fellowship with God, Himself. "For me," says the Apostle Paul, "to live is Christ."¹¹⁴⁰ That is why sin, the violation of God's law, is death¹¹⁴¹ - an estrangement of the life of man from the life

¹¹³⁸ Let Him lead thee blindfold onwards,
Love needs not to know;
Children whom the Father leadeth
Ask not where they go.
Though the path be all unknown,
Over moors and mountains lone.

- Gerhard Ter Steegan (on Isaiah 42:6)

¹¹³⁹ Job 2:9

¹¹⁴⁰ Philippians 1:21 For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain.

¹¹⁴¹ Ezekiel 18:4 Behold, all souls are mine; as the soul of the father, so also the soul of the son is mine: the soul that sinneth, it shall die.

of God. Since to know God is to live,¹¹⁴² unrighteousness is a kind of divorce from a loving God resulting in alienation and separation tantamount to death. The understanding that the psalmist seeks (144b) is not just of the righteous testimonies mentioned in the near context (144a), nor is it of the commandments he delights in nor of the law which is truth, nor of the unforgettable precepts. The psalmist is pleading for an understanding of all God's word as a means of understanding the LORD's righteousness - tzaddi ז. And that righteousness is an everlasting righteousness (142a) so that the life associated with it is not just life, but everlasting life. And that everlasting life, is a life lived in unbroken fellowship with God. This is true blessedness not in that it goes on forever, but that the joy of fellowship with God never ends. What the psalmist is seeking is what the Christian understands as heaven.

All this begs another question. The psalmist has clearly suffered some difficult times because of his love for God (141a, 143a) and his zeal for God's word (139). It is manifest that his continued love, remembrance, and delight in God in the face of such discouragements and difficulties will not go unrewarded, nor his prayers unanswered. As we are told by the writer to the Hebrew Christians, "... God is not unrighteous to forget your work and labor of love, which ye have shewed toward his name, in that ye have ministered to the saints, and do minister."¹¹⁴³ How will God answer the Psalmist's plea for understanding righteousness that leads to everlasting fellowship with Him? The last verse in this octave, points to the answer which follows in the next octave – ק koph. Koph means variously the back of the head or to ape. Both meanings are comprehended in a mode of following which has as its goal the emulation of the one being followed. It is as if God says in answer to the psalmist's plea, if you want to have fellowship with me, follow me, learn of me day by day in the many experiences of life. Learn to listen and listen to learn. "Though the Lord give you the bread of adversity, and the water of affliction, ... thine ears shall hear a word behind thee, saying, this is the way, walk ye in it, when ye turn to the right hand, and when ye turn to the left."¹¹⁴⁴

If we consider this last plea as the transition from ז (tzaddi) to ק (koph), from righteousness to following after righteousness then verses 144b and 145a interpenetrate and modify each other. "Give me understanding, and I shall live. ... I cried with my

Romans 6:23 For the wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.

¹¹⁴² John 17:3 And this is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent.

¹¹⁴³ Hebrews 6:10

¹¹⁴⁴ I have abbreviated the quote from Isaiah 30:20 – 21, to point out more clearly the relationship of adversity and the preparation of the heart to receive the word of God. The full quote suggests the presence of human instructors in righteousness and reads, "And though the Lord give you the bread of adversity, and the water of affliction, yet shall not thy teachers be removed into a corner any more, but thine eyes shall see thy teachers; And thine ears shall hear a word behind thee, saying, This is the way, walk ye in it, when ye turn to the right hand, and when ye turn to the left." I have truncated the passage not to alter its meaning, but to emphasize that the psalmists' plea is to God directly and that there are Biblical references which suggest that the day will come when the use of human teachers will cease. "And they shall teach no more every man his neighbor, and every man his brother, saying, Know the LORD: for they shall all know me, from the least of them unto the greatest of them, saith the LORD: for I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more. (Jeremiah 31:34)

whole heart; hear me, O LORD: I will keep thy statutes." The plea for understanding His righteousness is a whole-hearted cry to God; not just for a cerebral understanding, but for the grace to walk in accordance with the Lord's statutes; to walk with God, Himself. Like so many other promises, "I will keep thy statutes" not *quid pro quo* bargaining with God. It is a confession of the psalmist's utter dependency upon God. If God will grant the life changing, grace imparting understanding of His righteousness which the psalmist seeks, then he will be enabled to follow after God, to "walk in the law of the LORD" as one "undefiled in the way"¹¹⁴⁵

For the Christian, all of this finds its culmination in the person of Jesus Christ who tells those who come to Him, "If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me."¹¹⁴⁶ The self-denial and self-sacrifice that equate to discipleship, constitute God's answer to the psalmist's plea to walk in righteousness with Him, explains why the psalmist's sufferings of the are part of the answer to his prayer before he ever prayed it. If one would follow God, of necessity, one must chose not to walk in the way of the self-determined worldling, for no man can serve two masters.¹¹⁴⁷ Such a choice, as we have seen throughout this psalm, means trouble in the world but also accords completely with the Messianic plan of God: "Behold, the days come, saith the LORD, that I will raise unto David a righteous Branch, and a King shall reign and prosper, and shall execute judgment and justice in the earth. In his days Judah shall be saved, and Israel shall dwell safely: and this is his name whereby he shall be called, THE LORD OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS."¹¹⁴⁸

¹¹⁴⁵ Psalm 119:1

¹¹⁴⁶ Matthew 16:24 - 26 "Then said Jesus unto his disciples, If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me. For whosoever will save his life shall lose it: and whosoever will lose his life for my sake shall find it. For what is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?"

¹¹⁴⁷ Matthew 6:24 "No man can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon."

¹¹⁴⁸ Jeremiah 23:5 - 6

ק (KOPH)

☞ *The Psalmist's Cry* ☞

145 I cried with my whole heart;
Hear me, O LORD: I will keep thy statutes.

146 I cried unto thee; save me,
And I shall keep thy testimonies.

☞ *The Psalmist's Timing* ☞

147 I prevented the dawning of the morning,
And cried: I hoped in thy word.

148 Mine eyes prevent the night watches,
That I might meditate in thy word.

☞ *The Psalmist's Plea* ☞

149 Hear my voice according unto thy loving-kindness:
O LORD, quicken me according to thy judgment.

☞ *The Psalmist's Plight* ☞

150 They draw nigh that follow after mischief:
They are far from thy law.

151 Thou art near, O LORD;
And all thy commandments are truth.

☞ *The Psalmist's Mind* ☞

152 Concerning thy testimonies, I have known of old
That thou hast founded them for ever

☞

ק – **Koph** means the back of the head. It also means Ape or monkey {קוף - pronounced kofe}, but this is a rare use in scripture, occurring only twice describe an ape or monkey among the treasures of King Solomon.¹¹⁴⁹ More than any other species, apes bear a fascinating similarity to humans, then as now. The interrelation of these two diverse meanings can easily be answered by thinking about how we learn. We learn by following examples, by imitating others almost as a primate does humans. In this octave we begin to explore the nature of the psalmist's relationship with God through his eyes as a follower of God, a disciple. Koph conveys the disciple's view of the back of his master's head. When Peter tries to dissuade Jesus from going up to Jerusalem, after Jesus tells them that He will suffer and be killed there, Jesus answers Peter: "Get thee behind me, Satan: thou art an offence unto me: for thou savorest not the things that be of God, but those that be of men."¹¹⁵⁰ This stinging rebuke is also an invitation. Peter has

¹¹⁴⁹ 1 Kings 10:22, and 2 Chronicles 9:22

¹¹⁵⁰ Matthew 16:23

a choice either to be a well intentioned but ignorant adversary (a 'satan' - for such is the word's meaning) or a follower. He can either see Jesus' face as an adversary or the back of His head (koph) as a disciple. If the last octave held up the everlasting righteousness of God (137a, 142a), then His judgments, testimonies, words, precepts, law, and commandments must manifest a perfection that the psalmist needs to emulate, mimic, follow. In this octave we find a marked determination to learn by emulating. But the words beginning with ק – koph give a broader scope to the action behind these verses.

The core of discipleship is being taught by the master's feet. It is his footsteps not just his words that teach the all-important lesson: "This is the way, walk ye in it."¹¹⁵¹ Immediately after Jesus' rebuke of Peter, he says to all of His disciples, "If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me."¹¹⁵² Jesus is going in the way of the cross and He expects those who want to be his disciples to go the same way that He does. But being a disciple of the Son of God is a scary business as the psalmist well knows and tells us in this octave. The structure of this octave presents a picture of an anxious disciple under time pressure. In verses 145 and 146, he cries ¹¹⁵³ with his whole heart "save me." The psalmist's plight is 'You are near ¹¹⁵⁴ (verse 151) and I, who follow you, am right behind you. But these who follow mischief (violence) are drawing nearer to us both' (verse 150). That is why the psalmist is crying, "Hear ¹¹⁵⁵ me... save me ... Hear my voice according unto thy loving-kindness: O LORD, quicken me according to thy judgment" (145b, 146a, 149). He is saying, in effect, I am crying out loudly for you to move forward so that we can get away from these violent and evil people and be safe. The timing of the psalmist's frightening plight and associated cry offers him no comfort. His cry has prevented¹¹⁵⁶ the morning from being first (i.e. he has been crying to God long before the sun came up). And, although his constant watching for an answer has prevented the night watches from being the last thing to happen in the day, he still sees no answer (147-148). It seems to him as if His Master has turned a deaf ear and is doing nothing while danger approaches. If this goes on, the psalmist's natural fear is that he could get badly hurt or even lose his life. Taken together these present a picture of one who has been waiting morning and night in desperation for the One to come to his rescue from those who are already near intending mischief. He sights the One he has been waiting for and begins to cry out, accosting his Savior,

¹¹⁵¹ Isaiah 30:21 And thine ears shall hear a word behind thee, saying, This is the way, walk ye in it, when ye turn to the right hand, and when ye turn to the left.

¹¹⁵² Luke 9:23

¹¹⁵³ "cried" - קרא' qara' (pronounced kaw-raw') a primitive root meaning to call out to a person through with the idea of accosting that person met.

¹¹⁵⁴ "near" - קרוב qarowb, (pronounced kaw-robe' from קרב qarab) meaning near in place, in kindred, or in time as of kinsman that is near to help at just the right time. "draw nigh" - קרב qarab, (pronounced kaw-rab') a primitive root meaning to approach for whatever purpose, in this case mischief.

¹¹⁵⁵ "hear" - קול qowl, (pronounced kole) meaning to call aloud, bleating, crackling, crying out

¹¹⁵⁶ "prevent" - קדם qadam (pronounced kaw-dam) a primitive root; meaning to project one self before, i.e. precede; hence, to anticipate.}

crying out with his whole heart “save me.” His cry is insistent, like the bleating of sheep, or the endless cry of an ape. This scene has been of old, and yet it is ever new. This picture is reminiscent of the Syro-Phoenician¹¹⁵⁷ woman who dogged Jesus’ steps seeking deliverance for her demon possessed daughter or blind Bartimaeus whose cries for recovering his sight could not be silenced.¹¹⁵⁸ The psalmist knows that his salvation rests in following the One who is undefiled in the way, mimicking the One who walks in the law of the LORD, that keeps His testimonies, and who does no iniquity. And that one is Jesus.

In the normal course of religious history, people who become disciples do so not just to gain new intellectual knowledge, but to master a way of life that their master shows evidence of having mastered. They want to live life in a certain way but not necessarily to die in the process.¹¹⁵⁹ But the psalmist is not a disciple of men, and (hopefully) neither are we. God does not run from creatures deceived by their own ambition into doing harm to His disciples. He may or may not provide a deliverance from threats made against His disciples, but He does not run.¹¹⁶⁰ He is working out His eternal plan of

¹¹⁵⁷ Matthew 15:21-28 “Then Jesus went thence, and departed into the coasts of Tyre and Sidon. And, behold, a woman of Canaan came out of the same coasts, and cried unto him, saying, Have mercy on me, O Lord, thou Son of David; my daughter is grievously vexed with a devil. But he answered her not a word. And his disciples came and besought him, saying, Send her away; for she crieth after us. But he answered and said, I am not sent but unto the lost sheep of the house of Israel. Then came she and worshipped him, saying, Lord, help me. But he answered and said, It is not meet to take the children's bread, and to cast it to dogs. And she said, Truth, Lord: yet the dogs eat of the crumbs which fall from their masters' table. Then Jesus answered and said unto her, O woman, great is thy faith: be it unto thee even as thou wilt. And her daughter was made whole from that very hour.”

¹¹⁵⁸ Mark 10:46-52 And they came to Jericho: and as he went out of Jericho with his disciples and a great number of people, blind Bartimaeus, the son of Timaeus, sat by the highway side begging. And when he heard that it was Jesus of Nazareth, he began to cry out, and say, Jesus, thou Son of David, have mercy on me. And many charged him that he should hold his peace: but he cried the more a great deal, Thou Son of David, have mercy on me. And Jesus stood still, and commanded him to be called. And they call the blind man, saying unto him, Be of good comfort, rise; he calleth thee. And he, casting away his garment, rose, and came to Jesus. And Jesus answered and said unto him, What wilt thou that I should do unto thee? The blind man said unto him, Lord, that I might receive my sight. And Jesus said unto him, Go thy way; thy faith hath made thee whole. And immediately he received his sight, and followed Jesus in the way.

See also Matthew 20:30 - 34 “And, behold, two blind men sitting by the way side, when they heard that Jesus passed by, cried out, saying, Have mercy on us, O Lord, thou Son of David. And the multitude rebuked them, because they should hold their peace: but they cried the more, saying, Have mercy on us, O Lord, thou Son of David. And Jesus stood still, and called them, and said, What will ye that I shall do unto you? They say unto him, Lord, that our eyes may be opened. So Jesus had compassion on them, and touched their eyes: and immediately their eyes received sight, and they followed him.”

¹¹⁵⁹ Even those who follow cult leaders that eventually lead them in the way of death did not do so because they wanted to die, which explains why discipleship to a cult inevitably involves deception. “There is a way which seemeth right unto a man, but the ends thereof are the ways of death.” Proverbs 14:12 & 16:25

¹¹⁶⁰ The picture of His disciples presented in the great chapter on faith in the letter to the Hebrews makes this abundantly clear. “And what shall I more say? for **the time would fail me to tell of** (...) Gideon, and of Barak, and of Samson, and of Jephthae; of David also, and Samuel, and of the prophets: **Who through faith** subdued kingdoms, wrought righteousness, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions, Quenched the violence of fire, **escaped the edge of the sword**, out of weakness were made strong, waxed valiant in fight, turned to flight the armies of the aliens. Women received their dead raised to life again: - **and others** were tortured, not accepting deliverance; that they might obtain a better resurrection: And others had trial of cruel mockings and scourgings, yea, moreover of bonds and imprisonment: They were stoned, they were sawn asunder, were tempted, **were slain with the sword**: they wandered about in sheepskins and goatskins; being destitute, afflicted, tormented; (Of whom the world was not worthy:) they wandered in deserts, and in mountains, and in dens and caves of the earth. And these all, having obtained a good report through faith, received not the promise: God having provided some better thing for us, that they without us should not be made perfect.” Hebrews 11:32 – 40

salvation and not necessarily as we see it. The point to be observed lies in the last verse. “Concerning thy testimonies, I have known of old that thou hast founded them for ever.” As noted above, the chief testimony for the disciple is “this is the way, walk in it.” For Jesus that way involved self denial and suffering loss for those that He loves: God, His Father and those made in His image. But what self are we being asked to deny and what life are we being asked to sacrifice? Jesus answers this critical question with a paradox. “If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow me. For whosoever will save his life shall lose it: but whosoever will lose his life for my sake, the same shall save it.”¹¹⁶¹ Divine discipleship has always involved dying to a life marked by sin and selfishness. Such a life makes relationship with God impossible because that is not how He is. The apostle Paul tells us that we are to “Put off the old man ... (and) ... put on the new man”¹¹⁶² Mortification is the back side of sanctification. This is the testimony of Jesus. The single most important question then is whether or not we can truly say with the psalmist, “Concerning thy testimonies, I have known of old, that thou hast founded them for ever.” If that be so, then, despite the circumstances, we will be able to say with the psalmist and with the Apostle Paul “The LORD is on my side; I will not fear: what can man do unto me” ... “The Lord is my helper, and I will not fear what man shall do unto me.”¹¹⁶³

Following God

¹⁴⁵ I cried with my whole heart;
Hear me, O LORD: I will keep thy statutes.
¹⁴⁶ I cried unto thee; save me,
And I shall keep thy testimonies.



This octave begins with the psalmist’s whole-hearted cry unto God. In the last octave, we focused on **tzaddi** – righteousness. This octave focusses on **koph** – the back of the head or following after righteousness. There is a common expression, “Where there

¹¹⁶¹ Luke 9:23-24

¹¹⁶² Colossians 3:5-17 Mortify therefore your members which are upon the earth; fornication, uncleanness, inordinate affection, evil concupiscence, and covetousness, which is idolatry: For which things' sake the wrath of God cometh on the children of disobedience: In the which ye also walked some time, when ye lived in them.

But now ye also put off all these; anger, wrath, malice, blasphemy, filthy communication out of your mouth. Lie not one to another, seeing that ye have **put off the old man** with his deeds; and have **put on the new man**, which is renewed in knowledge after the image of him that created him: Where there is neither Greek nor Jew, circumcision nor uncircumcision, Barbarian, Scythian, bond nor free: but Christ is all, and in all.

Put on therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, bowels of mercies, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, longsuffering; forbearing one another, and forgiving one another, if any man have a quarrel against any: even as Christ forgave you, so also do ye. And above all these things put on charity (*i.e. love*), which is the bond of perfectness. And let the peace of God rule in your hearts, to the which also ye are called in one body; and be ye thankful. Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom; teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord. And whatsoever ye do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God and the Father by him.

¹¹⁶³ Psalm 118:6, Hebrews 13:6

is a will, there is a way.” This aphorism tells us that people who are deeply motivated to arrive at a place will find a way to get there. That way may be difficult or hidden or not even exist, but it will be forged, found, or followed. Both elements of this saying are present in these two verses.

The Will: The psalmist has the greatest desire to dwell with God in this world; so much so that he tells us twice that he has cried out. The first verse tells of the source of that cry (“I cried with my whole heart”) while the second verse tells us of the One to whom that cry was directed (“O LORD ... unto thee”). The two verses also tell us the simple content of his plea. The first verse implores God to “hear me,” while the second verse (which uses a more urgent construct in Hebrew) pleads with God to “save me.” Taken together these two verses put us in mind of others who have cried out to God. There is the cry of the hated tax collector who “... standing afar off, would not lift up so much as his eyes unto heaven, but smote upon his breast, saying, God be merciful to me a sinner.” Of this man, Jesus said that he “... went down to his house justified rather than the other; (*i.e. the proud, self-confident Pharisee*) for every one that exalts himself shall be abased; and he that humbles himself shall be exalted.”¹¹⁶⁴ There is the cry of the thief, crucified alongside of Jesus, who pleaded, “Lord, remember me when you come into your kingdom.” Of this man, Jesus said, “I say the truth unto you, today you shall be with me in paradise.”¹¹⁶⁵ There is the cry of blind Bartimaeus, “Jesus, thou Son of David, have mercy on me.” To him, Jesus said, “Go thy way; thy faith hath made thee whole.” Immediately he received his sight and followed Jesus in the way.¹¹⁶⁶ In all these cases, as in the case of the psalmist, the cry conveys the speaker’s sense of lostness coupled with their sense of utter helplessness. One of necessity’s most important lessons, for those willing to receive it, is the humility that acknowledges our utter dependency upon God for our salvation.

The Way: In his plea, the psalmist is not saying to God that if He will save him, then he will compensate God for His efforts by keeping His statutes and testimonies. What the psalmist is admitting here is that he is unable to do either. Had the psalmist been bargaining with God, he would have said ‘I have kept your statutes and testimonies so that now you are obligated to hear my cry and save me.’ But, if he cannot keep the statutes and testimonies, why mention them? Statutes are the application of God’s perfect law to the everyday situations of life. Testimonies, on the other hand, are what God tells us about the way things are. If we use a modern analogy, statutes tell us about the way we must take to get to where we want to go while testimonies tell us about the traffic conditions *enroute*. Statutes are about God’s way of living. Testimonies are about

¹¹⁶⁴ Luke 18:13 -14

¹¹⁶⁵ Luke 23:42 - 43

¹¹⁶⁶ Mark 10:46

the world in which that life must be lived. Discipleship (*i.e. following after 'the back of God's head', His ρ–koph*) requires such a knowledge of the way.

Grace through Faith: While these two verses describe the will and the way of which our aphorism made mention, actually following God in His way requires more. The Word of God, which is "... a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path,"¹¹⁶⁷ and the desire to go in that pathway, are necessary but not sufficient to enable us to take the next step. The psalmist knows personally what Paul has found. "I find then a law, that, when I would do good, evil is present with me. For I delight in the law of God after the inward man: But I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members. O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death?"¹¹⁶⁸

For the Christian, the answer to Paul's heart wrenching question, which is the equivalent of the psalmist's plea "save me", lies in the person of Jesus Christ. Following Jesus requires the grace of God, because no flesh can ever be justified to God by merely keeping the law with its statutes and testimonies.¹¹⁶⁹ The word of God in the Old Testament speaks of the λογος, the Word, Jesus the Christ, in the New Testament. He is the fulfillment of all that God says in the Old Testament. As such, the word, which is "a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path," anticipates the words of Jesus which are indeed a light to be received by faith as being true. Jesus, Himself, tells us, "I am the light of the world: he that follows me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life."¹¹⁷⁰ But following Jesus also requires the guidance and empowerment of the Holy Spirit. When Jesus was about to leave His followers, He told them "I have yet many things to say unto you, but ye cannot bear them now. Howbeit when he, the Spirit of truth, is come, he will guide you into all truth: for he shall not speak of himself; but whatsoever he shall hear, that shall he speak: and he will show you things to come. He shall glorify me: for he shall receive of mine, and shall shew it unto you."¹¹⁷¹ Salvation requires the Grace of God, then as now. "For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God"¹¹⁷² And again, "As ye have therefore received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk ye in him..."¹¹⁷³

¹¹⁶⁷ Psalm 119:105

¹¹⁶⁸ Romans 7:21 - 24

¹¹⁶⁹ Romans 3:20 "Therefore by the deeds of the law there shall no flesh be justified in his sight: for by the law is the knowledge of sin."

Galatians 2:16 "Knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law, but by the faith of Jesus Christ, even we have believed in Jesus Christ, that we might be justified by the faith of Christ, and not by the works of the law: for by the works of the law shall no flesh be justified."

¹¹⁷⁰ John 8:12

¹¹⁷¹ John 16:12 - 14

¹¹⁷² Ephesians 2:8

¹¹⁷³ Colossians 2:6

The Cost of Discipleship

¹⁴⁷ I prevented the dawning of the morning,
And cried: I hoped in thy word.

¹⁴⁸ Mine eyes prevent the night watches,
That I might meditate in thy word.



In the previous two verses, the psalmist told us of his whole-hearted crying unto God, that he might be heard and that God would save him. In these two verses, he tells us somewhat of the timing of his spiritual exercise: “the dawning of the morning” and “the night watches.” The picture these two verses present is even more compelling when we consider the watchman on the last watch which ran from 2 a.m. To 6 a.m. To such a person, the sunrise would be a most welcome advent marking the end of his duty, when the danger of a night time attack on the walled city would greatly diminish. Such a watchman would strain his eyes for the first rays that ended his work and promised increased safety.¹¹⁷⁴ But such an understanding makes 148a (to *prevent* the night watch) temporally equivalent to 147a (to *prevent* the dawning of the morning). In effect, the psalmist is telling us that he gave himself no rest in his pursuit of God’s favor but sought Him day and night without ceasing. So, these statements are not just about the times of the psalmist’s spiritual exercises (his cry of heart-felt cry of prayer and his meditation in God’s word) but about the choice he made in that pursuit. He is telling us that he has given his spiritual exercise the highest priority, preferring it over even the necessity of sleep. Again, this octave is colored by פ koph – the back of the head or following after righteousness, i.e. discipleship.

In the Gospels, Jesus explains what it means to be His disciple, to follow Him. “If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow me. For whosoever will save his life shall lose it: but whosoever will lose his life for my sake, the same shall save it. For what is a man advantaged, if he gains the whole world, and lose himself, or be cast away?”¹¹⁷⁵ Following this, as if to illustrate Jesus’ instruction, there are two vignettes of persons whom Jesus invited to follow him. “And he said unto another, ‘Follow me.’ But he said, ‘Lord, suffer me first to go and bury my father.’ Jesus said unto him, ‘Let the dead bury their dead: but go thou and preach the kingdom of God.’ And another also said, ‘Lord, I will follow thee; but let me first go bid them farewell, which are at home at my house.’ And Jesus said unto him, ‘No man, having

¹¹⁷⁴ The word *prevent* used here means literally to come before. So, the phrase “mine eyes *prevent* the night watches” speaks of the situation just before the dawn when the watchman’s eyes are straining to see the first rays of light in the night time darkness before the sun rises.

¹¹⁷⁵ Luke 9:23 - 25

put his hand to the plough, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God.”¹¹⁷⁶ The specifics of these two cases are different, but the answer is basically the same.

The first wanted possibly to gain his inheritance on the death of his father or possibly to exercise those religious duties respecting the burial of the dead found in Jewish religion. To him, Jesus answers with a paradox that plays on our understanding of the word dead. “Let the dead bury the dead” In effect He is saying, ‘Let those who persist in the deadness of formal religion render such services to those who have physically died’; implying that if you truly want to follow me there is a real spiritual work for you to do instead of fulfilling dead formalities or gaining wealth. The real work is to “Go thou and preach the kingdom of God.” To follow Jesus, thus, meant that he had to make a choice between self and God. Here was a man entangled with his religion or wealth and, therefore, procrastinating.

The second wanted to “bid them farewell”, to part on good terms with those he loved before he entered on the business of discipleship, before he “set his hand to the plow.” He wanted ... *“to take leave, inform them of the design, and set things at home in order. Jesus did not suffer this, because He probably saw that the man would be influenced by a love of his friends, or by their persuasions, not to return to him. The purpose to be a Christian requires decision. Men should not tamper with the world. They should not consult earthly friends about it. They should not even allow worldly friends to give them advice whether to be Christians or not. God is to be obeyed rather than man, and they should come forth boldly, and resolve at once to give themselves to his service.”*¹¹⁷⁷ A plowman “who sets his hand to the plow” must always look ahead not back to be successful, else his work will not be fit. The latter was irresolute and seeking perhaps the approval of others rather than trusting wholly in God’s direction.

In both cases the answer is the same: “but ... me first.” Discipleship with Jesus is fundamentally impossible when fellowship with God takes second place behind self, however we define self. Following after righteousness must be our first priority or it will have no priority at all. God must have preeminence in our lives or He will have no place at all. The psalmist is not as these were. In these two verses, he is telling us that he will have God’s favor at all costs. He is willing to give up his sleep to seek God’s face and favor. Doubtless he would have given up eating as well if God had deemed that necessary. The psalmist’s resolution should not be construed, however, as a self-determined giving up of the necessities of life (self-imposed fastings and vigils). Rather, if God so require, we must be willing to surrender our very lives in His service as many a martyr has done. It means just exactly what Jesus has said: denying the self-life and being willing to sacrifice all for the love of God. It remains for God to tell each of us

¹¹⁷⁶ Luke 9:59 – 62

¹¹⁷⁷ Albert Barnes’ Commentary on Luke 9:61

wherein self-denial and self-sacrifice lays. But our part as followers after righteousness is to be willing to pay the price that following God requires as an expression of our devotion. The greater our devotion, the greater will be the price we are willing to pay, remembering always, the greater the price required, the greater will be the grace of God that enables us to pay it. If we lose our life, for His sake, we really do find our life, by His grace.

The Basis of Hope

¹⁴⁵ I cried with my whole heart;

Hear me, O LORD: I will keep thy statutes.

¹⁴⁶ I cried unto thee; **save me,**

And I shall keep thy testimonies.

...

¹⁴⁹ **Hear my voice** according unto thy lovingkindness:

O LORD, quicken me according to thy judgment.



In this verse (149), the psalmist returns to his opening plea, “Hear me, O LORD ... save me.” Clearly the salvation that he seeks (146a) is to be quickened or preserved alive (149b). Whereas the basis for God’s answering the psalmist’s plea might have been construed as the apparent promise “I will keep thy statutes ... and I shall keep thy testimonies,” we recognized that the psalmist is no exception to the general rule that all have sinned and come short of the glory of God,¹¹⁷⁸ and he who sins is the slave of sin.¹¹⁷⁹ What the psalmist is saying, then, is that if God will hear his plea and save him by His grace, that saving grace will also enable him to keep God’s statutes and His testimonies. In effect, the psalmist is setting before us a most fundamental principle of following after righteousness: the grace that saves is also the grace that enables. But this leaves the question, on what basis, then, should God be gracious to the psalmist and to us. Verse 149 moves beyond the earlier verses to answer that question. The saving and enabling grace that the psalmist pleads for is, “according unto thy lovingkindness ... according to thy judgment.” In other words, whatever basis that the psalmist has for hoping that his prayer will be heard and that he will be saved, lies wholly within the Person of God. Salvation, the preservation of the psalmist’s life, rests upon God’s lovingkindness and His judgment. But the judgment of a Holy God should be precisely what a sinner trapped in his disobedience should fear most. How then can such a plea “quicken me according to thy judgment,” ever expect a favorable answer? Note that the psalmist mentions lovingkindness before judgment. Lovingkindness is the word “רַחֲמִים”

¹¹⁷⁸ Romans 3:23 For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God...

¹¹⁷⁹ John 8:34 Jesus answered them, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Whosoever committeth sin is the servant (δουλος or bond-slave) of sin.

(pronounced kheh'-sed) which comes from a root that means to bow or show one's self merciful. Hence, **חסד** means kindness, loving-kindness, or mercy. Judgment is the word **משפט** (pronounced mish-paw't') which means a verdict (favorable or unfavorable) pronounced judicially. If we take the two halves of the verse together we see that the psalmist is not just asking for a judgment, but a "lovingkindness ... judgment," a judgment of mercy. It is clear that such a plea is well within the scope of the covenantal relationship that God established with the psalmist's progenitor, Abraham and codified by the hand of Moses. Thus, in these three short verses the psalmist anticipates the central operative principles of the spiritual life lived in God: grace and mercy: mercy for sins past, and grace for obedience future. Both are necessary for fellowship and both have a constant role to play in our discipleship as well. The quickening which the psalmist seeks means to continue to live in fellowship with God.

Mercy: Establishing and maintaining a life of fellowship with God in the presence of isolated instances of sin ¹¹⁸⁰, requires the ongoing mercy of God. It is the same for us. The Apostle Paul tells us, "... But God, who is rich in mercy, for his great love wherewith he loved us, even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened ¹¹⁸¹ us together with Christ (by grace ye are saved) ... " ¹¹⁸² The Apostle John is even more direct, when he tells us that "if we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." ¹¹⁸³

Grace: But the spiritual life should issue in obedience to the will of God. Such obedience is possible, as we have pointed out, only by the grace of God. The apostle Paul tells us, "I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless, I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh, I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me. I do not frustrate the grace of God: for if righteousness come by the law, then Christ is dead in vain." ¹¹⁸⁴ What Paul is saying in these verses is that the life in the flesh that he once lived as Saul of Tarsus that involved trying unsuccessfully to be justified by keeping the law, ended with his apprehension of the reality and importance of the crucifixion of Christ. Now the life that he lives is really Christ living in and through him ¹¹⁸⁵ because of that faith which he has placed in the person of Jesus Christ and the spiritual efficacy of Jesus' death on the cross. The means of living that life is the grace of God which he does not frustrate by trying any longer to

¹¹⁸⁰ Psalm 119:5-6 "O that my ways were directed to keep thy statutes! Then shall I not be ashamed, when I have respect unto all thy commandments." – Psalm 119:176 "I have gone astray like a lost sheep; seek thy servant; for I do not forget thy commandments."

¹¹⁸¹ The Hebrew word for "quicken" is **חַיָּה** (pronounced khaw-yaw') a primitive root meaning, literally or figuratively, to live, and causatively, to revive. The Greek word for "quicken" is **ζωοποιεω** (pronounced dzo-op-oy-eh'-o) meaning literally or figuratively to re-vitalize or make alive. They present equivalent concepts.

¹¹⁸² Ephesians 2:4 - 5 In the reference to Paul, the process is a one time event resulting in a permanent change in state.

¹¹⁸³ 1 John 1:9 In the reference to John, the process is an ongoing one resulting in continued fellowship.

¹¹⁸⁴ Galatians 2:20 - 21

¹¹⁸⁵ My life seems to be a mere animal life "in the flesh," but this is not my true life; "it is but the mask of life under which lives another, namely, Christ, who is my true life" [LUTHER].

be justified by religiously keeping the law, which he knows cannot justify him to God. He further tells us that if it were possible to be justified to God by keeping the law than the substitutionary death of Jesus on the cross would have been unnecessary and therefore vain.¹¹⁸⁶

Faith: The principle of “grace through faith”¹¹⁸⁷ implies that there are actions on our part that give evidence of our faith. So too for the psalmist who has already mentioned two of them that form a pair: I prevented the dawning of the morning, and cried (*i.e. because*) I hoped in thy word. Mine eyes prevent the night watches, that I might meditate in thy word. (147 – 148). Finally, we see that the psalmist had concrete devotional practices (prayer to God because of his hope in God’s promises and meditation in the word) that were an expression of his faith in God’s lovingkindness. These two practices of prayer and meditation suggest that although his fellowship was not flawless, still there was ongoing fellowship with God. Given the wonderful character of the God he sought day and night by prayer and meditation, he had every reason to expect that God’s mercy and grace would forgive his failures and facilitate his exercise to bring him into ever closer fellowship with the LORD.

Fear

¹⁵⁰ They draw nigh that follow after mischief:

They are far from thy law.

¹⁵¹ Thou art near, O LORD; and

All thy commandments are truth.



If time was the measure of devotion in verses 147 and 148, space is the measure of danger (and safety), in these verses. The psalmist looks at his external situation and states simply that “They draw nigh that follow after mischief.” And while they are near to the psalmist spatially, they are far from the law of God spiritually because their intent relative to the psalmist. Verse 151 provides a counter vision, “Thou art near, O LORD; and all thy commandments are truth.” The nearness of the LORD in this verse is quite different, although the psalmist uses the same word in relation to God as those who are pursuing him.¹¹⁸⁸ The nearness of God is in reference to hearing the psalmist’s prayer, and being favorably aware of his situation. We may infer that his prayer at this point is for safety from those whose approach bodes evil – “mischief”. While the previous verses suggested the psalmist’s devotion, night and day in prayer and meditation, here the urgency of his need to be protected is also quite apparent. He is

¹¹⁸⁶ Greek, “Christ died needlessly,” or “without just cause.” Christ’s having died, shows that the law has no power to justify us; for if the law can justify or make us righteous, the death of Christ is superfluous [CHRYSOSTOM].

¹¹⁸⁷ Ephesians 2:8 For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God:

¹¹⁸⁸ קרב (kaw-rab') to approach for a purpose and קרוב (kaw-robe') near in place, kindred or time.

like a man who has been waiting night and day for one who alone can save him from harm and, suddenly he seeing his savior, cries out, "thou art near." He cries with great urgency, whereas earlier, he cried with great devotion.

These verses suggest that the psalmist has yet another choice to make. His earlier choice was interior, between physical necessity (sleep) and spiritual necessity (meditation and prayer). Clearly his love for God made the latter choice. In these verses, the psalmist also has a choice. But it is external, between surveying the nearness of lawless mischief makers or the LORD whose nearness is testified by the very thing his enemies reject – the truth of God. In short, to whom will he look in time of trouble. Jesus, Himself, warns His followers, "fear not them which kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul: but rather fear him which is able to destroy both soul and body in hell. Are not two sparrows sold for a farthing? and one of them shall not fall on the ground without your Father. But the very hairs of your head are all numbered. Fear ye not therefore, ye are of more value than many sparrows."¹¹⁸⁹ What Jesus is saying is that God does not always promise deliverance, but that what He expects, regardless of the external situation, is that we will reverently trust or fear Him, because the consequences of that choice extend far beyond time into eternity. To live our lives in the fear of men because they can kill the body (the ultimate mischief of lawless humanity), is to risk being confronted with a much more profound destruction, that of "both soul and body in hell." This notion is at the core of the plea of the repentant thief crucified with Jesus. He rebuked his railing companion, "Dost not thou fear God, seeing thou art in the same condemnation? And we indeed justly; for we receive the due reward of our deeds: but this man hath done nothing amiss."¹¹⁹⁰ The repentant thief was not expecting physical deliverance from the cross because he feared God. His fear of God spurred his hope that in eternity, he might fare better than he was faring in the present. "Lord, remember me when you come into your kingdom."¹¹⁹¹ And our Lord certifies that the thief's intentions were exactly in line with God's. In the context of whom to fear, Jesus makes reference to the sale of sacrificial sparrows. The individual sparrow's doom was sealed the moment they were taken in the fowler's net. Yet all were the objects of God's attention. Even the fifth sparrow, which was of no real value to the seller of sacrificial fowls,¹¹⁹² was an object of God's special attention even when they "fall to the ground." Seeing then that the least human is of far greater importance to God than many sparrows, we should ponder the importance of the choice that the psalmist is called to make. God is near and watching, not just as evil doers draw near, but whether His follower will make the right choice. This octave may be about the back of God's head, but we may rest assured,

¹¹⁸⁹ Matthew 10:28 -31

¹¹⁹⁰ Luke 23:40b - 41

¹¹⁹¹ Luke 23:42b

¹¹⁹² Two sparrows for a farthing and five for two farthings meant that the fifth sparrow was of no value to the seller of sacrificial fowls, but that worthless sparrow was of sufficient value to God to attract His attention.

based on our Lord's words, that God turns His head at this cry of the psalmist, not to survey the disciple's perilous situation, but to observe his choice under threat. We are reminded by these verses that the choices we make are central to what it means to follow God. Verse 151 helps us understand what the psalmist decides to do. He says, in effect, that although lawless mischief makers who mean me ill are drawing nearer You, God, are near and all Your commandments (with their promises) are true. Therefore, I choose to trust You.

The patterns of these interior/exterior choices with their attendant crises (internal vulnerability and external threat), are basically the two characteristic obstacles that face every disciple of Christ. In the case of the psalmist, it appears that he succeeded in both. But what of the real possibility (facing each of us) of failing in either or both trials, of making the wrong choices in the love of God or the fear of God. We see such a double failure with the disciples in Gethsemane. First, they were asked to watch with their Lord in prayer. But their eyes do not prevent the night watches (as in 148a). They fall asleep. When they awake, those who follow after mischief (Judas betraying Jesus and the temple guards arresting the Christ) drew near, so the disciples all flee. To any who had witnessed their willing spirits but weak flesh,¹¹⁹³ the thought would have been justified that these were disciples in name only. But, as we saw in the previous lesson, discipleship is possible only because of the grace of God. Just as the psalmist sought a judgment of mercy, so these find that after their spiritual failures in internal and external trials, the love of God will not let them go. They are restored and go on to be the Lord's Apostles. Their story of lapse and restoration should give us hope that when we make bad choices and come far short of following God, we can still hope in God whose lovingkindness is able to quicken us according to His merciful judgment.

A Rush to Judgment

¹⁵⁰ They draw nigh that follow after mischief:

They are far from thy law.

¹⁵¹ Thou art near, O LORD; and

All thy commandments are truth.

¹⁵² Concerning thy testimonies, I have known of old

That thou hast founded them forever.



Verse 152 concludes this octave and prepares us for what will follow. The verse has complex references to what has gone before. It begins with a statement that looks back to the thought, "And I shall keep thy testimonies." The reason that the psalmist desires

¹¹⁹³ Matthew 26:41 Watch and pray, that ye enter not into temptation: the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak. Mark 14:38 Watch ye and pray, lest ye enter into temptation. The spirit truly is ready, but the flesh is weak.

to keep God's testimonies is given here: "Concerning thy testimonies, I have known of old that thou hast founded them forever." This is a clear reference of those testimonies being foundational, over a very long time. The psalmist tells us first that "I have known of old that thou hast founded them." But even before he 'knew' them, they must have existed, so that their preexistence must have been well before the event of the psalmist's discovery of their presence, content, and authorship. He is also quick to affirm that "That thou hast founded them - forever." After the psalmist looks back a very long time - "of old", he looks ahead and sees still further into the future - "forever". We hear the echo of what the psalmist has said about God, Himself. "Before the mountains were brought forth, or ever thou hadst formed the earth and the world, even from everlasting to everlasting, thou art God."¹¹⁹⁴

But this verse is more than a statement about the eternal nature of God's testimonies, it also looks back to verses 147 and 148. There the word translated "prevented" is קדם qadam, a primitive root meaning to precede or to come before. In verse 152, the word translated "of old" is קדם qedem meaning absolutely the front place or, in terms of time, antiquity. This is more than a play on words. In 147 and 148, the psalmist told us he "prevented" (קדם qadam *i.e. came before*) both the dawning of the morning, and the night watches in order to cry to God because he hoped in and meditated on God's word. But these prevenient devotions were only possible because the word was "of old" (קדם qedem). He is telling us that the antiquity of God's word is the foundation of his prevenient devotions. Before his devotions could "prevent" the watches, the word had been there "of old" for meditation and to give him hope.

This verse supports the statement made in the verse 151b, "all thy commandments are truth." By its very nature, truth, as a revelation of God must be both eternal and immutable. The temporal references to the testimonies ("of old" ... "forever") hint at this eternal nature of truth, while the word for foundation ¹¹⁹⁵ suggests the immutability of God's word.

This verse is also a personal testimony of the psalmist. It tells us about something that he has "known of old," perhaps since childhood. Here is a man who has a history with God. One of the most fundamental cognitive tasks which confront people is that of making sense of apparently random and sometimes painful and confusing events that happen to each of us. Of old he has addressed this fundamental human need by prayer and meditation on God's word and found that God's testimonies about living a life pleasing to Him in a sinful world are true and steadfast. He has a similar advantage and admonition as Timothy, to whom the Apostle Paul said that, "... from a child thou hast

¹¹⁹⁴ Psalm 90:2

¹¹⁹⁵ יָסַד yasad, yaw-sad' a primitive root; to set (literally or figuratively); intensively, to found; reflexively, to sit down together, i.e. settle, consult, appoint, take counsel, establish, to lay the or lay for a foundation

known the holy scriptures, which are able to make thee wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus. All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works.”¹¹⁹⁶

Finally, the verse looks ahead to the octave 𐤒 – resh in the context of the perilous situation in which the psalmist finds himself. Despite the eternal nature of God’s word and its immutability, which inspire the psalmist to fear God and not men, he is still being pursued. “They draw nigh that follow after mischief” and “they are far from thy law.” But he quickly tells God, “Thou art near, O LORD; and all thy commandments are truth.” (*i.e. ... but I have chosen to trust you*)¹¹⁹⁷ So, 𐤒 – resh begins with the plea, “Consider mine affliction, and deliver me.” This plea does not fall on deaf ears. The octave of 𐤒 koph spoke of the back of the head or following after righteousness. But 𐤒 – resh speaks of the head in the sense of the One who is leading, or the One who comes first, the Captain.¹¹⁹⁸ One has the awesome sense, then, as the octaves intersect that the One whom the psalmist has been following and crying out to, has heard his plea and turned around. And those who have been pursuing the psalmist with ill-intent, those who are far from the law of God, have now come face to face with the Almighty. They have been rushing to harm the psalmist and instead find that they have rushed into the divine courtroom. Those who were “far from thy law” are now confronted with the King who established the law, the Judge who will pass sentence according to that law, and the Executioner who will carry out the law’s sentence. They who put the psalmist’s life at risk, now find that their own lives in grave jeopardy. They have rushed greedily to their own judgment!

¹¹⁹⁶ 2 Timothy 3:15 - 17

¹¹⁹⁷ Verse 151b makes an assertion, as we have noted, that suggests the basis on which the psalmist has chosen to trust God.

¹¹⁹⁸ Hebrews 2:10 For it became him, for whom are all things, and by whom are all things, in bringing many sons unto glory, to make the captain of their salvation perfect through sufferings.

ר (RESH)

Deliverance for the Afflicted

¹⁵³ Consider mine affliction, and deliver me:

For I do not forget thy law

¹⁵⁴ Plead my cause, and deliver me:

Quicken me according to thy word.

Mercy for a Seeker

¹⁵⁵ Salvation is far from the wicked:

For they seek not thy statutes.

¹⁵⁶ Great are thy tender mercies, O LORD:

Quicken me according to thy judgments.

Faithfulness for a Lover

¹⁵⁷ Many are my persecutors and mine enemies;

Yet do I not decline from thy testimonies.

¹⁵⁸ I beheld the transgressors, and was grieved;

Because they kept not thy word

¹⁵⁹ Consider how I love thy precepts:

Quicken me, O LORD, according to thy loving-kindness.

Eternal Judgment

¹⁶⁰ Thy word is true from the beginning:

And every one of thy righteous judgments endureth for ever.

❧

ר – Resh is identified with the common word ראש rosh which basically means head, but is used to indicate whatever leads or comes first: captain, summit, or cap stone. It is the core of the first word of the Bible בראשית - breshit meaning “in the beginning.” ר – resh leads to the notion of priority: putting first things first because that which is first is more important than the things that follow after. The priority in this octave is clearly on the salvation of the psalmist’s life. Because ר – resh means head, the verbs used in this verse might be seen to be preponderantly cerebral: to consider or behold (153, 158, 159) and to plead (154). But the psalmist most likely did not view the head as the seat of cognitive thought as we do. The head for him was an instrument of registering assent or rejection by nodding, much as we do today. The psalm suggests the setting of a law court involving both the judge who will hear the plaintiff’s plea and consider his case. The psalmist wants the judge to “Consider mine affliction, and deliver me” (153) He desires his mediator (attorney) to “plead my cause”¹¹⁹⁹ (154). Taken together, we have a picture of a plaintiff with his attorney in a court of law pleading for relief from his

¹¹⁹⁹ Literaly ריבה ריבתי - plead my plea

adversaries based on God's law: His word, statutes, judgments, testimonies, precepts, but most of all His tender mercies. Three times the psalmist pleads "quicken me" (i.e. let me live). Each request rests upon a different aspect of God's dealings with humanity: "Quicken me according to thy word" (154b); "Quicken me according to thy judgments" (156b); and "Quicken me, O LORD, according to thy loving-kindness" (159b). Behind each plea is a different threat. In the first plea, the psalmist seeks deliverance from affliction. In the second plea, he seeks salvation from the wicked. In the third plea, he seeks his life to be spared from his enemies and persecutors.

Deliverance from Affliction: We are not told exactly what the affliction is. Any affliction has the ability to distract, to occupy our minds with the present pain. That is why the psalmist pleads "Consider mine affliction, and deliver me for I do not forget thy law." In other words, the pains of his affliction have not so overwhelmed his consciousness that he has forgotten to do as God has told him to do. Affliction could give rise to complaint as it did with others:

In the day of my trouble
I sought the Lord:
My sore ran in the night, and ceased not:
My soul refused to be comforted.
I remembered God, and was troubled:
I complained, and my spirit was overwhelmed. Selah.¹²⁰⁰

Suffering can get the believer's eyes off God and onto self. It is a trial of faith ¹²⁰¹ that provides a great opportunity to exercise the will:

And I said, "This is my infirmity:
But I will remember the years of the right hand of the most High.
I will remember the works of the LORD:
Surely I will remember thy wonders of old.
I will meditate also of all thy work,
And talk of thy doings."

Deliverance from the wicked: The wicked, the psalmist tells us, are far from salvation because they do not seek God's statutes. By talking about them in this way, the psalmist is implying that he is unlike them. The example of their lives solicits the psalmist to follow suit. But, just as the wicked are consequently far from Salvation (ישועה - Yesh-oo'-aw, i.e. Jesus, whom he, in effect, has asked to plead for him as an intercessor in 154a) so he must be near that salvation because he has chosen to seek to know and

¹²⁰⁰ Psalm 77:2-3

¹²⁰¹ 1 Peter 1:6 – 7 Wherein ye greatly rejoice, though now for a season, if need be, ye are in heaviness through manifold temptations: that the trial of your faith, being much more precious than of gold that perishes, though it be tried with fire, might be found unto praise and honor and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ:

understand God's statutes. But seekers are not yet doers of those statutes, else why would they still be seeking. So, the psalmist knows that if God is ever going judge him worthy and "quicken him" it will be because of his "tender mercies" not the psalmist's flawless obedience.

Deliverance from Persecution: This third and last plea is related to the previous one. We are not told the specifics of the persecution only that it has taken place and that its perpetrators are his enemies. The picture is simple and familiar. When the psalmist chose not to follow their way, the wicked deemed him their enemy and started to persecute him. He has carefully looked at their way of life ("I beheld the transgressors") and was grieved when he saw they had no care for anything that God said. He, on the other hand, will not walk away from what God has said ("decline from thy testimonies") because he loves the way God thinks ("I love thy precepts"). So, he asks God again to "quicken me" on the basis that God is faithful to those who demonstrate their fidelity to Him.

The point to be observed here is that these pleas are not three separate requests but three aspects of a single request for salvation. The threats against the spiritual life of the individual may be many, but the chief issue is singular: life. It is always "Quicken thou me." If God's judgment favors the psalmist's urgent request, we must note how he sees it. "Thy word is true from the beginning: and every one of thy righteous judgments endureth for ever." How much is contained in the short exclamation "thy word is true"? Truth is marked by immutability. Truth, by its very nature is unchanging. There are of course relative truths which accurately describe a situation at one time but not at another, things having changed. But the psalmist is not talking here about relative truth. He is talking about absolute truth. And since, from the beginning of time, all God's words have been that kind of truth, then it follows that God's righteous judgments endure forever. If, therefore, God renders a favorable judgment relative to the psalmist's plea for life, that life, like the judgment itself, will endure forever. It is everlasting life. What is sought is more than just a favorable decision on the part of the judge, a nod of the head (ר – resh) in assent. It is not just salvation from affliction, the wicked, or persecution that is sought. The psalmist is not seeking salvation for salvation's sake. Each of these three threats (affliction, wickedness, and persecution) has the potential to do harm to his relationship with God. And it is preserving his relationship with God that is the leading principle, the highest priority, the capstone, the "resh" of the psalmist's life as well as ours. In this it is clear that the psalmist is seeking salvation in relation to God, Himself. And that salvation is linked to a Person: ישועה - Yesh-oo'-aw / Jesus, as we noted in the forth verse of the octave ע – ain (verse 123). This is the second mention of the Name and here the psalmist's confidence seems to be that his Mediator, Who pleads his cause, will succeed in winning the psalmist's case: that is "He will save." So here the mediatorial role of our Lord is presented and

we see another and deeper meaning behind the letter ׀ (resh – head or leader) that marks this octave. Salvation is not just a nod of the judge’s head that delivers, but a person who saves; a person like Joshua who was the leader or head that led the children of Israel into the Promised Land. In an analogous way our Lord Jesus is the head or leader who saves us and leads us into the fullness of the spiritual life with God in heaven. And in what does that life consist? In exactly what the psalmist has been basing his plea upon. “And this is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent.”¹²⁰²

The Heavenly Court

¹⁵³ Consider mine affliction, and deliver me:

For I do not forget thy law

¹⁵⁴ Plead my cause, and deliver me:

Quicken me according to thy word.



This octave begins with the plea that the psalmist uttered in the previous octave, “save me ... quicken me.” He cries out twice “deliver me” and once “quicken me.” But the cry “deliver me” is not just repetition. Its first instance is based on the plea “Consider mine affliction, and deliver me,” while the second instance is based on the plea “Plead my cause, and deliver me.” In the first petition, the psalmist addresses God the Judge. In the second petition, the psalmist addresses his mediator, his advocate. The last plea suggests the malevolence with which they, who are far from God’s law, draw near. (150). Their intent is deadly. While his physical enemies doubtless had emotional or even physical harm in view, their unseen master, whose lusts they serve, had only one intent which has been from the beginning – to separate the seeking soul from God. So, the psalmist’s plea for life, as we have noted, bears reference to much more than continued physical and material being. It bears relation to his continued fellowship with and life in God. The sole basis for his pleas is found in verse 153a, “I do not forget thy law.” One would think that this is a most unsatisfactory basis for a plea for deliverance. The psalmist does not say ‘I have always kept thy law’ because he has not. It is true that he apparently promised in verse 145b “I will keep thy statutes,” but as we saw this promise is impossible without the saving grace of God. There have been instances¹²⁰³ but these are exceptions.¹²⁰⁴

We have in these verses an opening view of the divine courtroom. The *dramatis personae* are all there: the divine Judge who is asked to “consider mine affliction”, the accuser of

¹²⁰² John 17:3

¹²⁰³ Psalm 119:55 I have remembered thy name, O LORD, in the night, and have kept thy law.

¹²⁰⁴ Psalm 119:5, 176a “O that my ways were directed to keep thy statutes! ... I have gone astray like a lost sheep; seek thy servant; ...”

the brethren ¹²⁰⁵ (as represented by his henchmen who are ‘far from thy law’ and bent on mischief), the accused (the psalmist), and his advocate or lawyer who is asked “plead my cause.” The plea is entered – deliverance from those who would separate him from his God and continued life. The basis of the defense is entered by the accused: not guilty by reason of the accused’s remembrance of thy law. The courtroom is silent. The accuser of the brethren has a winning case here and we have seen him in action before. He is formidable. He came before the divine Judge in the case of Job and worked much harm with his unceasing malevolence. “Doth Job fear God for nought?” ¹²⁰⁶ His evil insinuation was clever and, he thought, flawless. Was not Job’s fear of God part of his *quid pro quo* relationship with you? He fears you because you have put a hedge around him and blessed him, so that I cannot reach him and try his devotion to you. ... “Put forth thine hand now, and touch all that he hath, and he will curse thee to thy face.” True, Job was imperfect, but he, like the psalmist, remembered God’s law and did all he could to keep it. But Job was confident of his own righteousness. He, like all the rest, wanted to keep God’s law but was unable to do so. He was flawed and that flaw must necessitate some truth to the accuser’s complaint. So, with these few words the adversary gained permission to inflict a world of harm and mischief on a man who truly feared God as the psalmist does as demonstrated by his lack of fear of the accuser’s henchmen. With such a weak case, and such a clever accuser, what chance does the psalmist really have of winning his case?

All eyes turn to the advocate. What will he say? How will he turn such a ‘weak’ basis to a winning case for deliverance? Who is this one? In remembering God’s law, with as much understanding as that of which he is capable, the psalmist consents that the law is holy, just and good, as did the Apostle Paul after him.¹²⁰⁷ But, insofar as the law applies to a people, surely there must be someone who does no iniquity and walk in his ways.”¹²⁰⁸ But search as we may, no one ever arises who succeeds in this, for all have sinned and come short of the glory of God.¹²⁰⁹ What a lamentable situation. Who could

¹²⁰⁵ Revelation 12:10 And I heard a loud voice saying in heaven, Now, is come salvation, and strength, and the kingdom of our God, and the power of his Christ: for the accuser of our brethren is cast down, which accused them before our God day and night.

¹²⁰⁶ Job 1:6 -11 “Now there was a day when the sons of God came to present themselves before the LORD, and Satan came also among them. And the LORD said unto Satan, Whence comest thou? Then Satan answered the LORD, and said, From going to and fro in the earth, and from walking up and down in it. And the LORD said unto Satan, Hast thou considered my servant Job, that there is none like him in the earth, a perfect and an upright man, one that feareth God, and escheweth evil? Then Satan answered the LORD, and said, Doth Job fear God for nought? Hast not thou made a hedge about him, and about his house, and about all that he hath on every side? thou hast blessed the work of his hands, and his substance is increased in the land. But put forth thine hand now, and touch all that he hath, and he will curse thee to thy face.”

¹²⁰⁷ Romans 7:12 - 16 Wherefore the law is holy, and the commandment holy, and just, and good. Was then that which is good made death unto me? God forbid. But sin, that it might appear sin, working death in me by that which is good; that sin by the commandment might become exceeding sinful. For we know that the law is spiritual: but I am carnal, sold under sin. For that which I do I allow not: for what I would, that do I not; but what I hate, that do I. If then I do that which I would not, I consent unto the law that it is good.

¹²⁰⁸ Psalm 119:3

¹²⁰⁹ Romans 5:12 Wherefore, as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned: ... Romans 3:23 For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God; ...

ever stand against the accuser of all those who fear God and yet fail to keep the very law that they remember? John, on Patmos, knew this sorrow. "I wept much, because no man was found worthy."¹²¹⁰ But the picture suddenly changes for John, for the Psalmist, and for us, for he is told, "Weep not: behold, the Lion of the tribe of Juda, the Root of David, hath prevailed ..." ¹²¹¹ So John tells us who this mysterious advocate for the psalmist and for us really is. "We have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous: and he is the propitiation for our sins."¹²¹² And His defense is sure, so much so that the Apostle Paul will write, "For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive."¹²¹³ The case He pleads is not our flawless righteousness but His. The judgment we are delivered from, He has accepted in our place. Divine justice is satisfied.

"Sorrow unto Repentance"

¹⁵³ Consider mine affliction, and deliver me:
For I do not forget thy law



In the previous essay on this verse we considered the *dramatis personae* of the heavenly court. But we must also consider the proceedings. As noted in the overview the psalmist is seeking deliverance from affliction (153a), the wicked (155a) and their persecution (157a), all of which threaten his life. Hence, the repeated plea, "Quicken me." While the entire plaint may be seen as purely external with the three aspects of the psalmist's "quickenings" meaning the simple preservation of his physical life, there is also a case to be presented for the metaphysical nature of the conflict, in which the adversary of God's elect, Satan pursues those whom God has chosen with a particular malevolence against which the individual, so persecuted by wickedness, has no defense but to flee to God as their trusted refuge.¹²¹⁴

In this case the plea "Consider mine affliction, ... for I do not forget thy law", argues that the affliction, like the remembrance of the law, is purely internal. That the affliction is not an affliction of the body caused by malevolent persecutors, but an affliction of the

¹²¹⁰ Revelation 5:2 - 4: And I saw a strong angel proclaiming with a loud voice, 'Who is worthy to open the book, and to loose the seals thereof?' And no man in heaven, nor in earth, neither under the earth, was able to open the book, neither to look thereon. And I wept much, because no man was found worthy to open and to read the book, neither to look thereon.

¹²¹¹ Revelation 5:5 And one of the elders saith unto me, 'Weep not: behold, the Lion of the tribe of Juda, the Root of David, hath prevailed to open the book, and to loose the seven seals thereof.'

¹²¹² 1 John 2:1 - 2 My little children, these things write I unto you, that ye sin not. And if any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous: and he is the propitiation for our sins: and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world.

¹²¹³ 1 Corinthians 15:22 For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive.

¹²¹⁴ Hebrews 6:17 - 20 Wherein God, willing more abundantly to shew unto the heirs of promise the immutability of his counsel, confirmed it by an oath: that by two immutable things, in which it was impossible for God to lie, we might have a strong consolation, who have fled for refuge to lay hold upon the hope set before us: which hope we have as an anchor of the soul, both sure and steadfast, and which entereth into that within the veil; whither the forerunner is for us entered, even Jesus, made an high priest for ever after the order of Melchisedec.

soul caused by the very law which the psalmist constantly remembers. The law convicts him of his “weakness”¹²¹⁵ His sorrow and depression are not externally caused, but internal resulting from his own awareness of personal failure to keep the very law that he so admires. He suffers not from sinners outside, but from indwelling sin within. In this case, the psalmist’s affliction is similar to the apostle Paul’s cry “O wretched man that I am! Who shall deliver me from the body of this death?”¹²¹⁶ In effect Paul, like the psalmist, is crying out, ‘Who will quicken me?’ If this is the case, then the psalmist’s plea must seem strange, indeed. It is like entering a court followed by one’s accusers and pleading ‘guilty’ before they can even accuse you. But this sorrow is not linked to remorse for failure. It is not the sorrow which the world understands. In his first letter to the carnal Christians at Corinth, Paul had some particularly hard things to say about instances of their unacceptable behavior. The effect of the letter was to grieve the Christians at Corinth, but in a good way. Their sorrow was the ‘birth pangs’ of repentance. In his second letter to Corinth, the Apostle makes this clear.

“For though I made you sorry with a letter, I do not repent, though I did repent: ¹²¹⁷ for I perceive that the same epistle hath made you sorry, though it were but for a season. Now I rejoice, not that ye were made sorry, but that ye sorrowed to repentance: for ye were made sorry after a godly manner, that ye might receive damage by us in nothing. For godly sorrow worketh repentance to salvation not to be repented of: but the sorrow of the world worketh death. For behold this selfsame thing, that ye sorrowed after a godly sort, what carefulness it wrought in you, yea, what clearing of yourselves, yea, what indignation, yea, what fear, yea, what vehement desire, yea, what zeal, yea, what revenge! In all things ye have approved yourselves to be clear in this matter.”¹²¹⁸

What lies behind the psalmist’s plea, “Consider my affliction” is “godly sorrow (that) worketh repentance to salvation not to be repented of.” Indeed, it is such godly sorrow that underlies this entire psalm in one way or another. We remember the psalmist’s lament at the start of this psalm. “O that my ways were directed to keep thy statutes! Then shall I not be ashamed, when I have respect unto all thy commandments.”¹²¹⁹ And at the end of the psalm, we hear his plea. “I have gone astray like a lost sheep; seek thy servant; for I do not forget thy commandments.”¹²²⁰ Sorrow for sin and desire to change constantly emerge in the fabric of this psalm. This verse, like many personal testimonies

¹²¹⁵ עני (pronounced on-ee') from ענה (pronounced aw-naw') a primitive root meaning to depress literally or figuratively, abase self, chasten self, deal hardly with. Hence the word translated “affliction” here while meaning depression and misery has a reflexive nature of looking back on self. Goldingay translates it as “see my weakness and rescue me.”

¹²¹⁶ Romans 7:24

¹²¹⁷ “I do not repent, though I did repent’--Translate, ‘I do not regret it, though I did regret it.’ The Greek words for regret and repent are distinct. Paul was almost regretting, through parental tenderness, his having used rebukes calculated to grieve the Corinthians; but now that he has learned from Titus the salutary effect produced on them, he no longer regrets it.

- Jamieson-Fausset-Brown Commentary on 2 Corinthians 2:8

¹²¹⁸ 2 Corinthians 2:8 - 11

¹²¹⁹ Psalm 119:5 - 6

¹²²⁰ Psalm 119:176

of godly people, acquaints us with a paradoxical truth, the closer people come to God, the more sinful they perceive themselves to be. Job is one of those. "I have heard of thee by the hearing of the ear: but now mine eye seeth thee. Wherefore I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes."¹²²¹ As much as Job had suffered physical and emotional affliction from without, his confrontation with the impeccable and transcendent holiness of God, brought about suffering of another sort, a "godly sorrow (*which*) worketh repentance to salvation not to be repented of." It is this very affliction which becomes the profound motivator of the pursuit of holiness in God's elect. Instead of running away from God, they run toward Him. Their pain, caused by the realization that they are not like Him in holiness (as like can be for created beings), draws them after Him as an evidence of their love. To paraphrase Paul's evaluation of the Corinthians' repentance: 'What carefulness does such sorrow produce, what vindication, what indignation, what fear, and yes what vehement desire for God, Himself!' It would seem that the law, even in its condemnatory function can work a believer's good! It truly is the severe schoolmaster who lovingly brings us to Christ.¹²²²

Salvation

¹⁵⁴ Plead my cause, and deliver me:

Quicken me according to thy word.



Having considered the psalmist's "sorrow unto repentance", we come to the second half of his petition, "plead my cause, and deliver me." He addresses not the judge, but his advocate, whom he obviously believes will successfully plead his case. But on what basis can such a person possibly succeed? The desired end, "quicken me" (which we have equated with establishing fellowship with a transcendentally and impeccably Holy God and maintaining that fellowship despite repeated sin and moral failure) seems impossible. Yet the psalmist believes there is a basis for his hope. It is according to thy word.¹²²³ Whose word is he referring to? Is it the word of the judge, a promise of clemency for a repentant sinner latent in the law that condemns him? Or is it the word of the advocate, a promise of success in prosecuting the psalmist's plea? Whose ever word it is, the context makes clear that it is a word promising life to the sinner, salvation conditioned upon repentance and faith. So, whether of the divine judge, or the advocate, it must refer back to God, for who can give life but God, Himself? Yet, it is not the word of God alone in which he trusts but the qualifications his advocate. Were this not so, would he place his life with God in the hands on one unqualified for the task? We are

¹²²¹ Job 42:5 - 6

¹²²² Galatians 3:24 Wherefore the law was our schoolmaster to bring us unto Christ, that we might be justified by faith.

¹²²³ Actually the octave presents a three-fold basis for the psalmist's hope: it is "quicken me according to thy word (154b) ... according to thy judgments (156b) ... according to thy loving-kindness (159b).

led to wonder just who is this advocate pleading for the psalmist? And what a case it is! God's promise, in order to be valid, places upon God the responsibility for pardoning the sinner from the sentence of death.¹²²⁴ But how can God, Who is impeccably holy, pardon a sinner who worthy of death and still remain just? Either the sinner must die, or the impeccability of God must be compromised. God cannot lie, so the promise must be true. Carefully examined, this passage raises seemingly irresolvable problems. The Apostle Paul addresses this problem in his letter to the Christians at Rome. The apostle begins by establishing the universality of the psalmist's problem. He tells us that all people have sinned and all are worthy of eternal separation from God. "... we have before proved both Jews and Gentiles, that they are all under sin; as it is written, 'There is none righteous, no, not one' ... Therefore, by the deeds of the law there shall no flesh be justified in his sight: for by the law is the knowledge of sin."¹²²⁵

But the Apostle reviews the Old Testament and makes a surprising observation, that the righteousness of God is manifest in the very law that condemns but provides for sacrificial substitutes. It is also manifest in the life of the patriarch Abraham, who believed God and was accounted righteous.¹²²⁶ If we look back at the verse in hand, it becomes obvious that the psalmist, besides being repentant, believes in the Lord and His word as did Abraham. It is his faith, not the keeping of the law, that is counted to him for righteousness. For the Christian, the word of promise is a witness of the Eternal Word¹²²⁷, the second person of the God-head, Jesus Christ. So, the Apostle summarizes the whole principle of 'justification by faith' in a single sentence.

"But now the righteousness of God without the law is manifested, being witnessed by the law and the prophets; Even the righteousness of God which is by faith of Jesus Christ unto all and upon all them that believe: for there is no difference: For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God; Being justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus: Whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in his blood, to declare his righteousness for the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God; to declare, I

¹²²⁴ Ezekiel 18:4 Behold, all souls are mine; as the soul of the father, so also the soul of the son is mine: the soul that sinneth, it shall die.

¹²²⁵ Romans 3:9b, 10, 20

¹²²⁶ Genesis 15:3 – 6 And Abram said, Behold, to me thou hast given no seed: and, lo, one born in my house is mine heir. And, behold, the word of the LORD came unto him, saying, This shall not be thine heir; but he that shall come forth out of thine own bowels shall be thine heir. And he brought him forth abroad, and said, Look now toward heaven, and tell the stars, if thou be able to number them: and he said unto him, So shall thy seed be. And he believed in the LORD; and he counted it to him for righteousness.

Romans 4:3 - 6 For what saith the scripture? Abraham believed God, and it was counted unto him for righteousness. Now to him that worketh is the reward not reckoned of grace, but of debt. But to him that worketh not, but believeth on him that justifieth the ungodly, his faith is counted for righteousness. Even as David also describeth the blessedness of the man, unto whom God imputeth righteousness without works." See also Galatians 3:6, and James 2:23

¹²²⁷ John 1:1 - 4 In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. The same was in the beginning with God. All things were made by him; and without him was not any thing made that was made. In him was life; and the life was the light of men.

say, at this time his righteousness: that he might be just, and the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus." ¹²²⁸

So, faith (whether of Abraham, the psalmist, or ourselves) in God's word and the Eternal Word of which all Scripture testifies is counted as righteousness for the believer. Thus, God can "be just" and (at the same time) be "the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus." What then of God's Justice? Is this merely a setting aside of its righteous demands of the law for judgment and quelling the furious anger of an impeccably holy God against sin and His revulsion at the moral deformity of the sinner? Certainly not! The answer lies in the advocate that the psalmist has employed. For him, as for us, that one is Jesus Christ, "Whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in his blood, to declare his righteousness for the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God." It is Jesus Himself, who expiates the guilt of the psalmist and ourselves by the shedding of His blood on the cross and who propitiates the righteous anger of God resulting in divine forbearance throughout all the ages of this world. The Apostle John speaks to us of the psalmist's advocate, "My little children, these things write I unto you, that ye sin not. And if any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous: And he is the propitiation for our sins: and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world." ¹²²⁹

Separation as Deliverance

¹⁵⁴ Plead my cause, and deliver me:

Quicken me according to thy word.

¹⁵⁵ Salvation is far from the wicked:

For they seek not thy statutes.



In terms of the metaphor of proximity, verse 155 builds on verse 150 and adds to it: "They draw nigh that follow after mischief" (*but*) "they are far from thy law" (*and consequently*), "salvation is far from the wicked." As we have observed, it is salvation that the psalmist is seeking. Salvation for him means following God whereas the wicked, "follow after mischief." The psalmist desires to learn the statutes, but the wicked "seek not thy statutes." ¹²³⁰ Consequently, it is not their malice that he fears so much as their company that he wants to avoid. This alerts us to the fact that salvation has a twofold

¹²²⁸ Romans 3:20 - 26

¹²²⁹ 1 John 2:1 - 2

¹²³⁰ ¹⁵⁰ They draw nigh that follow after mischief:

They are far from thy law.

...

¹⁵⁵ Salvation is far from the wicked:

For they seek not thy statutes.

aspect, separation from the world and separation unto God. So, the request that his advocate plead his cause, involves not just deliverance from indwelling sin, but also deliverance from the wicked as well. He seeks salvation, but since “salvation is far from the wicked” success in pleading will result in the psalmist being far from the wicked who are far from God. What the psalmist is seeking, in effect, are the internal and external aspects of sanctification, freedom from sin within (purification) and freedom from sinners without (separation). The term sanctification refers to the process by which holiness of character is formed in the individual believer. It is the appropriate response to the command of God in His impeccable holiness, “Be ye holy.”¹²³¹ Separation from sinners is one of the central attributes of the advocate to whom the psalmist appeals.¹²³² It is this latter petition, deliverance from the wicked that seems most to accord with the will of God. In addressing the Corinthian believers, the Apostle Paul admonishes them:

*“Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers: for what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? And what communion hath light with darkness? And what concord hath Christ with Belial? or what part hath he that believeth with an infidel? And what agreement hath the temple of God with idols? For ye are the temple of the living God; as God hath said, I will dwell in them, and walk in them; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you, and will be a Father unto you, and ye shall be my sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty.”*¹²³³

From a disciplinary standpoint, the internal and external aspects of the process of sanctification are unquestionably linked. Becoming free from the power of indwelling sin and the external, societal circumstances in which that process can proceed unobstructed are as linked as restoration of health from illness is affected by the sanitation of the surroundings in which healing takes place. The Apostle Paul warns the Corinthian believers “Be not deceived: evil communications corrupt good manners.”¹²³⁴ Ideally the local Christian church should function as a “hospital of souls” for just this reason. The company of godly people should tend to reinforce godly behavior. The psalmist himself makes reference to this phenomenon, “I am a

¹²³¹ The command is first expressed in Leviticus 20:7 “Sanctify yourselves therefore, and be ye holy: for I am the LORD your God. “Holiness unto the LORD” was much required and desired. (see Jeremiah 2:3 and Zechariah 14:20-21). The Old testament is rife with references to “holy things” and a holy people. It is Peter who reminds believers that his necessity for practical holiness has not ceased to be a desire of God. “But as he which hath called you is holy, so be ye holy in all manner of conversation; because it is written, Be ye holy; for I am holy.” (1 Peter 1:15-16)

¹²³² Hebrews 7:22 - 28 “By so much was Jesus made a surety of a better testament. And they truly were many priests, because they were not suffered to continue by reason of death: But this man, because he continueth ever, hath an unchangeable priesthood. Wherefore he is able also to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by him, seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for them. For such an high priest became us, who is holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners, and made higher than the heavens; Who needeth not daily, as those high priests, to offer up sacrifice, first for his own sins, and then for the people's: for this he did once, when he offered up himself. For the law maketh men high priests which have infirmity; but the word of the oath, which was since the law, maketh the Son, who is consecrated for evermore.”

¹²³³ 2 Corinthians 6:14 – 18

¹²³⁴ 1 Corinthians 15:33 Do not be tricked by false words: evil company does damage to good behavior. (Bible in Basic English)

companion of all them that fear thee, and of them that keep thy precepts."¹²³⁵ Fellowship and discipleship are linked. The psalmist knows that he cannot totally escape contact with the wicked. The Apostle Paul touches on this problem. Of an earlier letter to the Corinthian believers (now lost), he writes, *"I wrote unto you in an epistle not to company with fornicators: yet not altogether with the fornicators of this world, or with the covetous, or extortioners, or with idolaters; for then must ye needs go out of the world."*¹²³⁶ God calls us out of the world system and to holiness of life. But the process of sanctification proceeds in the world and the separation we feel within ourselves causes us to behave differently with regard to former acquaintances who continue in sin. For their part, their wonder at our behavioral change can degenerate into hostility. But for us there is an increasing realization that we no longer want to share in their riotous living.¹²³⁷ What then shall we say of those who have pursued the psalmist into the divine courtroom seeking to work their mischief? Jesus, Himself, tells us of their final judgment, *"these shall go away into everlasting punishment: but the righteous into life eternal."*¹²³⁸ This is the final deliverance, complete separation from sinners. As Jesus' account makes clear, they also were given the chance to repent and believe, just as the psalmist, but tragically they said no.

¹²³⁵ Psalm 119:63

¹²³⁶ 1 Corinthians 5:9 - 10

¹²³⁷ 1 Peter 4:1 -5 *"Forasmuch then as Christ hath suffered for us in the flesh, arm yourselves likewise with the same mind: for he that hath suffered in the flesh hath ceased from sin; that he no longer should live the rest of his time in the flesh to the lusts of men, but to the will of God. For the time past of our life may suffice us to have wrought the will of the Gentiles, when we walked in lasciviousness, lusts, excess of wine, revellings, banquetings, and abominable idolatries: Wherein they think it strange that ye run not with them to the same excess of riot, speaking evil of you: who shall give account to him that is ready to judge the quick and the dead."*

¹²³⁸ Matthew 25:32 - 46 *"And before him (God the Judge of all the earth) shall be gathered all nations: and he shall separate them one from another, as a shepherd divideth his sheep from the goats: And he shall set the sheep on his right hand, but the goats on the left. Then shall the King say unto them on his right hand, Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world: For I was an hungred, and ye gave me meat: I was thirsty, and ye gave me drink: I was a stranger, and ye took me in: Naked, and ye clothed me: I was sick, and ye visited me: I was in prison, and ye came unto me. Then shall the righteous answer him, saying, Lord, when saw we thee an hungred, and fed thee? or thirsty, and gave thee drink? When saw we thee a stranger, and took thee in? or naked, and clothed thee? Or when saw we thee sick, or in prison, and came unto thee? And the King shall answer and say unto them, Verily I say unto you, inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me. Then shall he say also unto them on the left hand, depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels: For I was an hungred, and ye gave me no meat: I was thirsty, and ye gave me no drink: I was a stranger, and ye took me not in: naked, and ye clothed me not: sick, and in prison, and ye visited me not. Then shall they also answer him, saying, Lord, when saw we thee an hungred, or athirst, or a stranger, or naked, or sick, or in prison, and did not minister unto thee? Then shall he answer them, saying, Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye did it not to one of the least of these, ye did it not to me. And these shall go away into everlasting punishment: but the righteous into life eternal."*

Courageous Persistence

¹⁵⁶ Great are thy tender mercies, O LORD:
 Quicken me according to thy judgments.
¹⁵⁷ Many are my persecutors and mine enemies;
 Yet do I not decline from thy testimonies.



Verse 156 mentions both God’s mercies (156a) and God’s judgments (156b). It is not unusual to see mercy set in contradistinction to judgment. In such a contrast, judgment points to condemnation for sin, while mercy points to forgiveness of sin. In the case of the psalmist’s sense of indwelling sin and personal failure to keep God’s statutes, such a contrast is certainly appropriate. But that is not the nature of the quickening judgment sought in 156b. The judgment sought here is one that settles the matters that have arisen between the plaintiffs (the psalmist’s persecuting enemies) and the defendant (the psalmist). It is about settling a dispute between human protagonists, not a moral issue between God and the psalmist. As we saw in the previous verse, the psalmist is seeking not only deliverance from the power of indwelling sin (153 – 154) but also deliverance from the wicked (154 – 155). In this latter sense, deliverance involves creating a division between the parties as a basis for separating them from one another. The psalmist is referring to the role of a judge as a divider whether of inherited wealth or relations slated for separation. Jesus, Himself, takes note of this judicial capacity “And one of the company said unto him, Master, speak to my brother, that he divides the inheritance with me. And he said unto him, Man, who made me a judge or a divider over you?”¹²³⁹

But formalizing a division of people involves the judge’s recognition that such a division already exists because of a fundamental difference in character between the individuals involved in the litigation. The psalmist has been at pains to show that this division exists and is real. He tells God that they who draw nigh to me, who follow after mischief are far from God’s law, (150) but I do not forget thy law (153b). The wicked seek not thy statutes (155b) but I do not decline from thy testimonies (157b). What the psalmist is saying in this first verse is that failure to recognize the *defacto* division between himself and the wicked, and to leave him to their malevolence would be most unkind or unmerciful. But he knows that God is full of tender mercy. So, the judgment the psalmist is seeking involves God’s decision to show mercy or kindness to himself and to rule against the plaintiffs (my persecutors and my enemies). In effect, he is pleading that God would separate the wicked from himself “as a shepherd divides his sheep from the goats.”¹²⁴⁰

¹²³⁹ Luke 12:13 – 14

¹²⁴⁰ Matthew 25:31 - 33 “When the Son of man shall come in his glory, and all the holy angels with him, then shall he sit upon the throne of his glory: and before him shall be gathered all nations: and he shall separate them one from another, as a shepherd divideth his sheep from the goats: and he shall set the sheep on his right hand, but the goats on the left.”

For us, the way of which Isaiah speaks lies not in trying to obtain righteousness through keeping the law, but through faith in Jesus Christ Who tells us “I am the way...”¹²⁴⁶ May we be encouraged by the psalmist’s courageous persistence to do likewise.

Suffering for Righteousness Sake

- ¹⁵⁷ Many are my persecutors and mine enemies;
Yet do I not decline from thy testimonies.
- ¹⁵⁸ I beheld the transgressors, and was grieved;
Because they kept not thy word.
- ¹⁵⁹ Consider how I love thy precepts:
Quicken me, O LORD, according to thy lovingkindness.



In verse 158, the psalmist opens his heart to God in order to give his reason for not declining from God’s testimonies (157b). He tells God (and us) that he has steadily beheld the transgressors that draw nigh to him and that his emotional response to the lawlessness of their lifestyle is not fear but grief. The grief of which he speaks is not the powerful and persistent emotion that we feel when we lose someone that we love through death. The word translated “grieved” is קָוַי (pronounced koot) a primitive root meaning, properly, to cut off, or figuratively to detest, to loathe. What he is saying is that “I have seen betrayers and loath them.”¹²⁴⁷

Such an opening of the heart is unnecessary for God, Who knows the hearts of men better than they do themselves. The deceitful human heart ¹²⁴⁸ can fool its host, but it cannot fool God. But the psalmist, who has been at pains to plead that the judge recognize the division that already exists between himself and the transgressors gives us insight into his inner sufferings associated with this division. Loathing is not a pleasant emotion. God knows, of course, that the wicked play an inadvertent role in the perfecting of the character of the righteous, as we observed in the last lesson. Even if they do not actively solicit the psalmist’s abandonment of following God, their manner of life can have the same potential effect. Elsewhere the psalmist confesses, “... As for me, my feet were almost gone; my steps had well-nigh slipped, for I was envious at the foolish, when I saw the prosperity of the wicked.”¹²⁴⁹ It is not without reason that the wise man counsels, “Fret not thyself because of evil men, neither be thou envious at the wicked; for there shall be no reward to the evil man; the candle of the wicked shall be

¹²⁴⁶ John 14:6 Jesus saith unto him (*i.e. 'doubting' Thomas*), I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me.

¹²⁴⁷ Goldingay’s translation of verse 158a

¹²⁴⁸ Jeremiah 17:9 - 10 “The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked: who can know it? I the LORD search the heart, I try the reins, even to give every man according to his ways, and according to the fruit of his doings.

¹²⁴⁹ Psalm 73:2 - 3

put out.”¹²⁵⁰ The counterpoint to the suffering that his loathing of the wicked causes is his love of God’s precepts in verse 159a. Here, he asks God to consider how he loves His precepts, where before he asked that God consider his affliction (153a). In regards to the former request for consideration we saw both the internal affliction caused by imperfect obedience and moral failure as well as the external affliction caused by those who drew near with mischief in mind. But here we see yet a third element of the psalmist’s sufferings: that of suffering for righteousness sake. Jesus takes note of this type of suffering in His Sermon on the Mount. “Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness’ sake: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake. Rejoice, and be exceeding glad: for great is your reward in heaven: for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you.”¹²⁵¹ Peter echoes his Master’s teaching in his first epistle. “But and if ye suffer for righteousness’ sake, happy are ye: and be not afraid of their terror, neither be troubled.”¹²⁵²

The psalmist does not, however, reiterate his first request “consider my affliction” even though he might. Instead he pleads, “Consider how I love ...” These two pleas are not entirely separate. The one argues the other. He suffers because he loves. This linkage hints at how the malevolence and the machinations of the wicked foster the psalmist’s spiritual development. His assertion of continued fidelity in the face of persecution is a testimony of perseverance. God is not looking merely for the individual believer to suffer as an evidence of their love for Him. Rather He allows such suffering for righteousness sake for the development and the deepening of that love. He allows an environment in which suffering for love develops patience in that very suffering. Again, Peter sums all this up in his first epistle that has much to say about suffering.

*“For this is thankworthy, if a man for conscience toward God endure grief,¹²⁵³ suffering wrongfully. For what glory is it, if, when ye be buffeted for your faults, ye shall take it patiently? But if, when ye do well, and suffer for it, ye take it patiently, this is acceptable with God. For even hereunto were ye called: because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that ye should follow his steps”*¹²⁵⁴

And that is precisely what the psalmist has been telling God. I have not declined from your testimonies even though these lawless transgressors want to do me much harm. The psalmist has been suffering because he has followed God. And he follows God

¹²⁵⁰ Proverbs 24:19 - 20

¹²⁵¹ Matthew 5:10 – 12

¹²⁵² 1 Peter 3:14

¹²⁵³ The word translated grief here is λυπη (pronounced loo'-pay), a primary word meaning sadness, grief, grievous, heaviness, sorrow. While different from כִּוֵּץ (koot) to loathe, there is an emotional connection between the two words in that we have a sense of grief (sadness) over our personal losses caused by those we loathe and who do us much harm.

¹²⁵⁴ 1 Peter 2:19 - 21

because he loves God. In his loathing with it attendant suffering, he has manifested the patient perseverance that gives evidence of a mature love for God. In this there is both glory and praise of God. It was this pathway that Jesus, Himself, trod in the days of His earthy ministry, “leaving us an example, that ye should follow his steps.”

The Impatience of Love

¹⁵³ Consider mine affliction, and deliver me:
For I do not forget thy law

¹⁵⁴ Plead my cause, and deliver me:
Quicken me according to thy word.

...

¹⁵⁹ Consider how I love thy precepts:
Quicken me, O LORD, according to thy lovingkindness.



In verse 159, the psalmist continues to open his heart to God. This verse continues the earlier plea for God to “consider mine affliction” (153a). As we noted, the affliction may be internal, the result of not forgetting God’s law (153b) with an attendant sense of guilt and failure. But, it may also be external; the malevolence against one who does not forget God’s law (153b) by those who “are far from thy law” (150b). The consideration of how the psalmist loves God’s precepts is clearly a matter of the heart. As noted before, the two pleas for God to consider or ‘see’¹²⁵⁵ are linked. Love involves suffering, or affliction. And suffering for righteousness sake requires patience. Peter describes this in his first epistle. *“For what glory is it, if, when ye be buffeted for your faults, ye shall take it patiently? But if, when ye do well, and suffer for it, ye take it patiently, this is acceptable with God. For even hereunto were ye called: because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that ye should follow his steps.”*¹²⁵⁶ But the need for patience argues the presence of impatience. The sense of urgency in verse 150a colors the tone of the plea in 153/4 b. *“They draw nigh that follow after mischief ... deliver me.”* The urgency of our situation is often the handmaid of our impatience with God’s timing. Deliverance can’t come fast enough! Godly impatience, however, has both a reflexive dimension involving the pain we feel and a divine dimension involving God’s honor and vindication.¹²⁵⁷

¹²⁵⁵ רָאָה (pronounced raw-aw') is a primitive root meaning to see, literally or figuratively.

¹²⁵⁶ 1 Peter 2:20 - 21

¹²⁵⁷ We see this impatience with the Martyrs mentioned in the book of Revelation. “And when he had opened the fifth seal, I saw under the altar the souls of them that were slain for the word of God, and for the testimony which they held: And they cried with a loud voice, saying, ‘How long, O Lord, holy and true, dost thou not judge and avenge our blood on them that dwell on the earth?’ And white robes were given unto every one of them; and it was said unto them, that they should rest yet for a little season, until their fellow servants also and their brethren, that should be killed as they were, should be fulfilled.” Revelation 6:9 - 11

We have encountered this before. To consider means to look, to see, and to behold with the eye. Accordingly, this same heart picture emerges in verses 127 – 128 of the octave *✠* – ain, the eye or vision.

¹²⁶ It is time for thee, LORD, to work:

For they have made void thy law.

¹²⁷ Therefore I love thy commandments

Above gold; yea, above fine gold

¹²⁸ Therefore I esteem all thy precepts concerning all things to be right;

And I hate every false way.

The pattern is the same. There is the hatred of every false way (128b) that makes void God's law (126b) and the loathing of transgressors (158a), who are far from God's law (150b). This strong emotion only serves to emphasize the love that the psalmist has for God's commandments (127a) and the respect that he has for God's precepts (153b & 159a). But in verse 126a, we see something that is not mentioned in the verses in hand – impatience! "It is time for thee, LORD, to work." This is not just impatience in suffering internal and external affliction. It is the impatience of love. It is a further demonstration of the psalmist's love for God. The psalmist wants to see God take action that will vindicate Himself against those who pay no attention to Him and do not fear Him. He wants to see God exalted and not ill respected.

This twofold plea, consider my affliction and how I love thy precepts, serves, then, as the basis for the central petition, that the psalmist might continue to live or be 'quickened' in God. If God's faithful word is the basis for first iteration of the psalmist's plea; it is His lovingkindness that is the basis for the third iteration of the same plea. There is a parallelism in these verses as well as similarity. We might argue that psalmist's fidelity to the word of God (in this case His law) should result in God's fidelity to the psalmist in deliverance and quickening. Similarly, the love of the psalmist for God's precepts should result in God's lovingkindness to the psalmist again in quickening. Here, as in other places, it is possible to see that the psalmist is relying on a *quid pro quo* bargain. I have done this so (I hope) that you will act similarly and in accordance with my plea. That would be the case if the psalmist's compound action (not forgetting because of his love) preceded God's action that grants his request. But such cannot be the case, because the giving of the law must have preceded the remembrance of it, and God's loving kindness must have preceded the psalmist's love for God's precepts. So, the basis for the psalmist's plea for salvation, for continued life in God, rests not on his faltering obedience or even his imperfect love for God, but on the love of God for the psalmist that preceded all. The Apostle John says it so simply, "We love him, because he first loved us."¹²⁵⁸ And the evidence of God's love for the psalmist rests

¹²⁵⁸ 1 John 4:19

within his heart in its hatred of evil and its jealousy for God's honor.¹²⁵⁹ God will deliver the psalmist, He will quicken him, because He loves him, and because the psalmist trusts in that love.

The Patience of Faith

¹⁶⁰ Thy word is true from the beginning:

And every one of thy righteous judgments endureth forever.¹²⁶⁰



The psalmist ends this octave not with a renewed plea ("quicken me"), but with a two-fold assertion about the Judge with whom he has been pleading. The word of the Judge is true and every one of His judgments are righteous altogether. The duration of time over which this dual character of God's word and decisions are displayed is "from the beginning" to "forever." But the psalmist is not making an abstract statement about divine communication. He knows that God's word (in whatever form it comes) is revelatory of God, Himself. In making this two-fold assertion, he reveals his confidence that God is eternally and immutably true and righteous (or faithful.) We should note in passing, that righteousness and fidelity, while somewhat different, nevertheless speak to the nature of any godly relationship. A righteous relationship involves mutual fidelity. And fidelity has to do not only with actions but with the alignment of words and actions. It may be that the word spoken is a promise in which case the action will be its fulfillment. It may be that the word spoken is a command, in which case the action will be obedience. In any case, for a faithful person, their word is their bond. What was said of Boaz speaks well of our Lord Jesus, of whom Boaz was a type: "The man will not be in rest, until he has finished the thing this day."¹²⁶¹ That is, Boaz will not rest until he has fulfilled his promise to Ruth. In that case, as here, the word spoken is revelatory of the action that will be taken because both word and action reveal the character of the one speaking and doing.

¹²⁵⁹ We see this emotional state in the sufferings and flight of Elijah. "And he said, 'I have been very jealous for the LORD God of hosts: for the children of Israel have forsaken thy covenant, thrown down thine altars, and slain thy prophets with the sword; and I, even I only, am left; and they seek my life, to take it away.' And he said, 'Go forth, and stand upon the mount before the LORD.' And, behold, the LORD passed by, and a great and strong wind rent the mountains, and brake in pieces the rocks before the LORD; but the LORD was not in the wind: and after the wind an earthquake; but the LORD was not in the earthquake: And after the earthquake a fire; but the LORD was not in the fire: and after the fire a still small voice. And it was so, when Elijah heard it, that he wrapped his face in his mantle, and went out, and stood in the entering in of the cave. And, behold, there came a voice unto him, and said, 'What doest thou here, Elijah.' And he said, I have been very jealous for the LORD God of hosts: because the children of Israel have forsaken thy covenant, thrown down thine altars, and slain thy prophets with the sword; and I, even I only, am left; and they seek my life, to take it away." 1 Kings 19:10 - 14

¹²⁶⁰ Goldingay translates this verse as follows: Truthfulness is the sum total of your word;
Every faithful decision of yours stands forever.

Goldingay's use of the term "sum total" in lieu of KJV phrase "from the beginning" should not seem strange. The concept "sum total" stretches "from the beginning" to the end which, of course, is "forever." Both cola, therefore interpenetrate and modify each other emphasizing that the twin characteristics of truth and fidelity are linked from beginning to ending, which suggests that they are eternal.

¹²⁶¹ Ruth 3:18b

In what a wonderful way, then, does the psalmist end his urgent plea to be quickened, by testifying of his confidence that God's word is true and that He is faithful to His servants. There is an element of tension, however, caused by the inclusion of a time line (from the beginning to forever). In human experience, the promise must precede the redemption of the promise; the command must precede the fulfillment of obedience; the warning must precede chastisement; and the judgment must precede its execution. In the divine relationship with people, the word precedes action. Thus, the time between when the divine word is spoken (which is inevitably true because God is light) and when it is fulfilled, allows space for the individual to believe that word and take action upon it. Here, the temporal hiatus between the word of truth and the demonstration of that truth in judgment allows for faith, because judgment has not been rendered. The psalmist testifies that God's judgments are righteous *before* God renders His judgment on the psalmist's behalf, a judgment that will not be momentary and liable to appeal, but which will endure forever! In this couplet, then, we see the psalmist's utter faith in the truth of what God has said and his willingness to be bound by God's decision before God ever utters it. Time is involved here as well testimony, and time is under God's providential control. The psalmist has testified of his love for God (159a), and now testifies of his faith in God (160). But in the time between God's speaking and the psalmist's declarations of love for and faith in that spoken word, the psalmist must wait on God to vindicate his trust. Waiting on God takes patience.

As we noted in the last lesson, the psalmist may have been manifesting a loving impatience with God's timing because he was jealous for the vindication of God against the wicked who grieved him with their indifference to God's word (158). The shift, then, in these verses from the impatience of love to the patience of faith is remarkable.¹²⁶² Here we see somewhat of the mysterious impact that the machinations of evil men can have on the sanctification of the righteous. The Apostle Paul explains:

*"Therefore, being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ: by whom also we have access by faith into this grace wherein we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God. And not only so, but we glory in tribulations also: knowing that tribulation worketh patience; and patience, experience; and experience, hope and hope maketh not ashamed; because the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost which is given unto us."*¹²⁶³

'Justification by faith' speaks of a one-time rendering of a judicial decision which is irreversible in divine jurisprudence. Having been rendered, the individual is forever declared righteous by reason of Divine imputation (an accounting term). We know that

¹²⁶² Not that impatience is the evidence of love or that patience is the evidence of faith. Both faith in God and love for God should manifest patience. Impatience, as life teaches us, is the evidence of immaturity, while patience speaks of maturity. Mature love and faith are both patient.

¹²⁶³ Romans 5:1 - 5

the principle of imputed righteousness was operative in the psalmist's day, because it was first revealed with Abraham,¹²⁶⁴ who lived long before the psalmist. Having been declared righteous, therefore, Paul tells us that a new mode of divine operation is in effect. Not only do we have peace with God, but we have (constant, daily, need-related) access to the grace of God that enables us to stand day by day in the presence of God. The receipt of this grace gives us a joyous hope that in the ages to come we shall manifest the abundant glory of God because of the grace that we have received from Him through Jesus Christ.¹²⁶⁵ But, because of imputed righteousness, there arises also the suffering of trials of our faith¹²⁶⁶ or tribulations. And these tribulations too are a source of glory because they work and ever greater weight of glory.¹²⁶⁷ Therefore, we are content to wait the manifestation of God's glory in us because of that increase of glory which tribulation works by making us even more dependent on the grace of God to withstand them. This willingness to wait on God's timing for the increase of His glory, the apostle calls patience, or patience in suffering.¹²⁶⁸

¹²⁶⁴ Ge 15:6 And he (*Abraham*) believed in the LORD; and he counted it to him for righteousness.

¹²⁶⁵ Ephesians 2:4 - 9 "But God, who is rich in mercy, for his great love wherewith he loved us, even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ, (by grace ye are saved) and hath raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus, that in the ages to come he might shew the exceeding riches of his grace in his kindness toward us through Christ Jesus.

¹²⁶⁶ 1 Peter 1:6 - 7 Wherein ye greatly rejoice, though now for a season, if need be, ye are in heaviness through manifold temptations, that the trial of your faith, being much more precious than of gold that perisheth, though it be tried with fire, might be found unto praise and honor and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ:

¹²⁶⁷ 2 Corinthians 4:17 For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory.

¹²⁶⁸ 2 Thessalonians 1:3 - 4 We are bound to give thanks to God always to you, brethren, even as it is meet, for that your faith growth exceedingly, and the love of each one of you all toward one another aboundeth; so that we ourselves glory in you in the churches of God for your patience and faith in all your persecutions and in the afflictions which ye endure. (ASV)

ש (SCHIN)

☞ *The Present Struggle* ☞

- 161 Princes have persecuted me without a cause:
But my heart standeth in awe of thy word.
- 162 I rejoice at thy word,
As one that findeth great spoil.
- 163 I hate and abhor lying:
But thy law do I love.
- 164 Seven times a day do I praise thee
Because of thy righteous judgments

☞ *The Great Peace* ☞

- 165 Great peace have they which love thy law:
And nothing shall offend them.

☞ *The Psalmist's Past Performance* ☞

- 166 LORD, I have hoped for thy salvation,
And done thy commandments
- 167 My soul hath kept thy testimonies;
And I love them exceedingly.
- 168 I have kept thy precepts and thy testimonies:
For all my ways are before thee.

☞

ש - **Schin** means tooth or defense.¹²⁶⁹ We can understand these meanings by asking what we use our teeth for. Our teeth help us eat, speak, and defend ourselves. Even today we have the expression “fighting tooth and nail.” If we look at the octave in this way we see that the spiritual life is a battle in which the Word of God is a strong defense. But it is also food for our spiritual life and a Word to be spoken to others (the Gospel).

The octave begins with the progress of evil intent against the psalmist. Whereas, in verse 23a, we read: the “princes also did sit and speak against me”, now we read, they “have persecuted me without a cause” (161a). As people grow closer to God in an ungodly world, the struggle against their soul will grow more intense. The psalmist implies that he is not offended by this unjust persecution (i.e. caused to stumble by their unjust and causeless attack) because he, like all who love thy law, has great joy (162)

¹²⁶⁹ n.b. On a personal note, I see in the letter ש – Schin a remarkable testimony to the Trinity. The three lobes each have a distinct presence, joined at the base by a common union. It reminds me that God is One in essence and undivided but manifest in three Persons, God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. This sense (which I can find in no other commentary on the letter) is nevertheless strengthened in my mind by the classic announcement by Moses in Deuteronomy 6:4 “Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God is one LORD”. This saying is called the Shema for the first word שמע meaning to hear. If I am correct, then it is exceedingly interesting that that the most arresting testimony to the oneness of God should begin with a symbolic testimony to God’s tri-unity.

and great peace (165a) which are the outward symptoms of spiritual victory. To prevent their being surprised by this state of increasing opposition, Jesus advises His followers: "These things I have spoken unto you, that in me ye might have peace. In the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world."¹²⁷⁰ Overcoming the world's opposition is extended to us by means of God's word which we receive by faith: "because every one who is begotten of God doth overcome the world and this is the victory that did overcome the world--our faith."¹²⁷¹ But what is the strategy and what are the tactics in such warfare?

The psalmist's strategy is self evident: to focus steadfastly on the God whom he loves and on His utterances (word, law, judgments, commandments, precepts, and testimonies) which he keeps. This octave contains no petition, as such. But the entire passage may be seen as a plea based upon the psalmist's actions: "for all my ways are before thee." The phrase "my ways" hint at his tactics, and as he rehearses them in the ear of God, we are blessed to be able to observe the means by which this internal struggle of his soul is won. His tactics are seven in number and describe both his inward state and outward actions: 1. awe of and joy in God's word, 2. hatred of falsehood, 3. love of God's word, 4. constant meditation on God's judgments, 5. hope in God's saving grace, 6. obedience as an expression of love for God, 7. thinking as God would have him think while paying attention to God's testimonies about his situation.

1. My heart standeth in awe of thy word. I rejoice at thy word. (161b – 162a)

In the spiritual life, the battle is internal. Our warfare is not a material warfare, nor are our weapons carnal.¹²⁷² In these verses we explore how it is that the psalmist meets not so much his external persecutors, but the spiritual malevolence that lies behind their actions. In 161a, the malevolent actions of the persecutors present the psalmist with a choice: fear men or fear God. He chooses the latter, "my heart standeth in awe of thy word" and presumably not those malevolent princes. The awe or fear of the LORD is a great brake upon the human tendency to sin. "Stand in awe, and sin not: commune with your own heart upon your bed, and be still. Selah."¹²⁷³ The word of God provides the psalmist with a formidable emotional defense against human intimidation. But the next verse goes further. Not only does he stand in awe of that word, but he rejoices in it. Struggle tends to reduce our courage in spiritual combat, but a solid source of joy in God's word (especially His promises) gives us courage to persevere.

¹²⁷⁰ John 16:33

¹²⁷¹ 1 John 5:4 (Young's literal translation)

¹²⁷² Paul describes this struggle in 2 Corinthians 10:3-6 "For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war after the flesh: (For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty through God to the pulling down of strong holds;) casting down imaginations, and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ; and having in a readiness to revenge all disobedience, when your obedience is fulfilled."

¹²⁷³ Psalm 4:4

2. I hate and abhor lying. (163a)

Not only does the truth of God's word fill us with great joy, but it sets us free. One of the most effective tools of the devil is the half truth or an outright lie.¹²⁷⁴ It was Satan's lie in the garden that caused our first parents to fall. A vehement hatred of any thing false or untrue is also a hatred of anything that enslaves the soul. Those who believe a lie and sin because of it, foolishly become the bond slaves of sin.¹²⁷⁵ Such a hatred of untruth is an emotional consequence of a love for God's word. Humans are not so created that they can serve two masters. "Either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other"¹²⁷⁶ In this case we see again the psalmist's choice.

3. I love thy law, thy precepts, and thy testimonies. (163b, 165a, 167b, 168a)

To love the revealed truth of God (His word, law, judgments, commandments, precepts, and testimonies) is to desire them. To desire them is to have great joy when we find them like the joy of discovering a great treasure. Of necessity, such true joy must be balanced by a hatred of everything false and untrue. "No man can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon."¹²⁷⁷ Evil directed against us bids fair for the occupation of our minds with the evil and not with God. For this reason, the apostle Paul bids us, "whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things."¹²⁷⁸ Evil gets an upper hand in the spiritual warfare if we condescend to think upon it rather than focus on God (contemplation) and those things pertaining to Him (meditation). Again, the psalmist tells us, that when "Princes ... did sit and speak against me ... thy servant did meditate in thy statutes."¹²⁷⁹ Such reflection on God's righteous judgments is the sure foundation of their praise.

4. Seven times a day do I praise thy righteous judgments. (164)

¹²⁷⁴ John 8:44 "Ye are of your father the devil, and the lusts of your father ye will do. He was a murderer from the beginning, and abode not in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaketh a lie, he speaketh of his own: for he is a liar, and the father of it."

¹²⁷⁵ Jesus makes this linkage between truth and freedom; vs. a lie / sin and bondage clear in His answer to the Pharisees. "'And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.' They answered him, 'We be Abraham's seed, and were never in bondage to any man: how sayest thou, Ye shall be made free?' Jesus answered them, 'Verily, verily, I say unto you, whosoever committeth sin is the servant of sin.'" John 8:32-34 The idea of bondage resulting of sins based on willful ignorance of truth (i.e. presumptuous sins) is found in Psalm 19:13 Keep back thy servant also from presumptuous sins; let them not have dominion over me: then shall I be upright, and I shall be innocent from the great transgression.

¹²⁷⁶ Matthew 6:24 No man can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon.

¹²⁷⁷ Matthew 6:24

¹²⁷⁸ Philippians 4:8

¹²⁷⁹ Psalm 119:23

The next verse provides much more than a statement about the psalmist's active devotional life. Many dear saints have morning and evening devotions. Some even take time to praise God at noon, making it three times a day. But the psalmist praises God seven times a day, which is considerable. But given that he is involved in spiritual warfare, such frequent devotion is both understandable and necessary. The act of praising God for His righteous judgments shifts the psalmist's focus from men to God and for those accustomed to praising God at length, they are aware that such an exercise alters the emotional tone of the individual. What we are looking at here is the source of the joy mentioned in verse 162. Not only is there great joy, there is great peace so that nothing that is going on outside them (persecution) or inside them (spiritual warfare) disturbs their quiet confidence in the God upon Whom their attention is focused.¹²⁸⁰ The number seven times a day argues not so much a set pattern for devotion as a settled habit of devotion. His reflection on God's righteousness was a constant, ongoing process like a watchman constantly patrolling the walls during his watch.

5. I have hoped for thy salvation. (166a)

Not only do we require love of truth and courage borne of joy and gratitude, but we require hope in the spiritual battles of life. And, as shown in ♪ – ain: verse 123, the psalmist's hope is centered in the person of Jesus Christ. The writer to the Hebrews also reminds us to look unto Jesus lest we be weary in our struggle and faint.¹²⁸¹ What then is this soul-battle all about? In a word, it is about salvation. The psalmist knows that he cannot save himself, that he cannot overcome, by himself, the evil directed against him. It is God who must save him, so above all he has "hoped for thy salvation."¹²⁸² In his day, the psalmist most likely saw salvation as an action that God would take on his behalf, to overcome the unjust persecution directed against him. But, as noted above, we overcome the world's opposition by Jesus' overcoming. And His overcoming is integral to His experience of our humanity. In His birth, He overcomes our finitude and becomes our Brother. In His death on the cross, He overcomes our moral failure and becomes our Savior. In His resurrection, He overcomes our fatality and becomes our Life. In His intercession, He overcomes our frailty as our High Priest. In His return, He

¹²⁸⁰ Paul links joy and peace thus "Rejoice in the Lord always: and again I say, Rejoice. Let your moderation be known unto all men. The Lord is at hand. Be careful for nothing; but in every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God. And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus." Philipians 4:4-7

¹²⁸¹ Hebrews 12:1-4 Wherefore seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us, Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith; who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God. For consider him that endured such contradiction of sinners against himself, lest ye be wearied and faint in your minds. Ye have not yet resisted unto blood, striving against sin.

¹²⁸² thy "יֵשׁוּעָה" yeshuw'ah, - Jesus

will overcome our forlornness as our Bridegroom. We overcome because He has overcome. His victory is ours.

6. I have done thy commandments. (166b)

In every battle, we need a leader, one who, grasping the grand strategy, tells us what the next tactical step is. The soldier calls such instructions orders or commands. The psalmist carries on a successful warfare by doing just that. "I have... done thy commandments." Obedience argues not sinless perfection, which we know is not possible for sinful humanity, but rather another way of saying that the Psalmist loves God. "If ye love me, keep my commandments," Jesus tells His followers.¹²⁸³

7. I have kept thy precepts and thy testimonies. (168a)

But the psalmist also tells us that he has "kept thy precepts and thy testimonies." In stating that he has kept thy testimonies, it is the very utterance that tells him what it is that he is fighting for. He loves those testimonies because his heart is in this battle. The best soldiers fight not just for themselves but for those they love. And the psalmist's struggle ultimately rests on his love for God, Whose presence he values and whose thought patterns he tries to emulate. He has 'trusted in the LORD with all his heart; and not leaned on his own understanding.'¹²⁸⁴ He loves God's testimonies of how things are and not chosen his own view of the situation. Battles, well fought, bring victory. They also bring recognitions of valor and courage, of sacrifice and bravery. There are many ways a good soldier manifests these great virtues and the psalmist closes with his account of obedience with the statement "all my ways are before thee." What was true of him should also be true of us so that when all the struggles of life on earth are over, our Lord Jesus will be able to say to each one of us "Well done, good and faithful servant "¹²⁸⁵

Choosing the Right Side

¹⁶¹ Princes have persecuted me without a cause:
But my heart standeth in awe of thy word.



Here begins the octave ♯ – SCHIN. In the previous octave we closed with the psalmist's confidence that God is eternally faithful and true. Here we begin the trial of that faith in the rough and tumble of daily life. As we observed above, ♯ – Schin means tooth and defense. The psalmist is engaged in a spiritual battle. The princes who formerly "... did sit and speak against me" (23a) have now ramped up their animosity. They have now

¹²⁸³ John 14:15

¹²⁸⁴ A rendering of Proverbs 3:5

¹²⁸⁵ Mt 25:21, 23 His lord said unto him, Well done, good and faithful servant; thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things: enter thou into the joy of thy lord.

“persecuted me without a cause.” For those in positions of power, the “princes”, governance involves the use of executive power to punish wrong doers, people who threaten the peace and safety of others. But these “princes” have decided to misuse their governmental power. When they look at the psalmist they can find no wrong worthy of punishment. He is persecuted “without cause.” Nevertheless, they proceed against him. Rather than punishment, then, their actions are correctly labeled “persecution.” The psalmist’s experience here adumbrates the sufferings of Jesus, who testified to His disciples, “they hated me without a cause.”¹²⁸⁶ Of course, there is a cause for all human actions. The implication being that the cause of those who misuse their power to persecute the innocent cannot possibly be just. To those who chose to persecute Him, and possibly to those who chose to persecute the psalmist here, the motive that Jesus assigns is greed and envy. “...Come, let us kill him, and the inheritance shall be ours.”¹²⁸⁷ Nor is this suffering unique to Jesus or the psalmist. As we follow our Lord, we can expect the same treatment. “The servant is not greater than his lord. If they have persecuted me, they will also persecute you”¹²⁸⁶

There is, of course, another more sinister reason people persecute one another: control of the will. As with any violence directed against people, there is a belief that violence (which naturally engenders the victim’s fear of being hurt) can give the perpetrator power over the will of the one they choose to threaten. They seek to rule the will of another by reason of their terror. Struggles and wars arise, in part, when one group or individual refuses to succumb to such domineering emotional pressure. Peter discovered first-hand that the power of the fear of men could exert enormous influence over the will when he was forced by his fear of men to deny his Lord, whom he loved deeply, three times. He also knew first-hand the liberating power of God when he stood up and defended the little company of believers against the curious and possibly hostile crowd of thousands on Pentecost. When you suffer, he told his fellow believers, “be not

¹²⁸⁶ John 15:20 - 25 “Remember the word that I said unto you, **The servant is not greater than his lord. If they have persecuted me, they will also persecute you;** if they have kept my saying, they will keep yours also. But all these things will they do unto you for my name’s sake, because they know not him that sent me. If I had not come and spoken unto them, they had not had sin: but now they have no cloak for their sin. He that hateth me hateth my Father also. If I had not done among them the works which none other man did, they had not had sin: but now have they both seen and hated both me and my Father. But this cometh to pass, that the word might be fulfilled that is written in their law, **‘They hated me without a cause.’**” Jesus is here quoting Psalm 69:4 “They that hate me without a cause are more than the hairs of mine head: they that would destroy me, being mine enemies wrongfully, are mighty: then I restored that which I took not away.”

¹²⁸⁷ Mark 12:1 - 8 “And he began to speak unto them by parables. A certain man planted a vineyard, and set an hedge about it, and digged a place for the wine vat, and built a tower, and let it out to husbandmen, and went into a far country. And at the season he sent to the husbandmen a servant, that he might receive from the husbandmen of the fruit of the vineyard. And they caught him, and beat him, and sent him away empty. And again he sent unto them another servant; and at him they cast stones, and wounded him in the head, and sent him away shamefully handled. And again he sent another; and him they killed, and many others; beating some, and killing some. Having yet therefore one son, his well-beloved, he sent him also last unto them, saying, ‘They will reverence my son.’ But those husbandmen said among themselves, **‘This is the heir; come, let us kill him, and the inheritance shall be ours.’** And they took him, and killed him, and cast him out of the vineyard.” Matthew 27:17 -18 “Therefore when they were gathered together, Pilate said unto them, Whom will ye that I release unto you? Barabbas, or Jesus which is called Christ, for he knew that for envy they had delivered him.”

afraid of their terror, neither be troubled.”¹²⁸⁸ We see this very clearly in the second colon (161b). What the psalmist is telling God (and us) is ‘although the princes persecute me without a just cause, I have chosen rather to stand in awe of your word and not their malevolence.’ The “but” with which verse 161b starts is profoundly important! The attempt to influence our will through fear or terror presents us with a choice: to fear men or to fear God. The choice is foundational to our spiritual life. This choice was a real problem for Israel throughout their national life. Israel was located in what might be called a “corridor” between North Africa (and Egypt) and the Fertile Crescent of the Near East. They were a never a formidable military power and, as other more powerful nations arose, they felt their vulnerability. Yet God had promised to defend them against all comers if only they trusted Him. But the worldly wise among them urged a more tangible means for survival – alliances with stronger powers, basically trusting the promises of men rather than those of God. Isaiah puts his finger on the problem directly.

*“... The LORD spoke thus to me ... ‘Say ye (i.e. Isaiah) not, A confederacy, to all them to whom this people shall say, A confederacy; neither fear ye their fear, nor be afraid. Sanctify the LORD of hosts himself; and let him be your fear, and let him be your dread. And he shall be for a sanctuary; but for a stone of stumbling and for a rock of offence to both the houses of Israel, for a gin and for a snare to the inhabitants of Jerusalem. ‘”*¹²⁸⁹

What God is saying to Isaiah is that he should not go along with the people who look to form alliances with those who terrorize them, but rather that he should fear God Who, according to His immutable covenant, will be for him a sanctuary, but for those who refuse to fear Him and trust His Word a stumbling stone and a trap. The passage in Isaiah looks ahead to Jesus who is in fact that “stone of stumbling.”¹²⁹⁰ Rather than fear men, the psalmist’s heart chooses to stand “in awe of thy word” which is to say in reverent awe of God, Himself. The terrors of men, then provide each of us an

¹²⁸⁸ 1 Peter 3:13 - 16 “And who is he that will harm you, if ye be followers of that which is good? But and if ye suffer for righteousness’ sake, happy are ye: and be not afraid of their terror, neither be troubled; But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts: and be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you with meekness and fear: Having a good conscience; that, whereas they speak evil of you, as of evildoers, they may be ashamed that falsely accuse your good conversation in Christ.”

¹²⁸⁹ Isaiah 8:11 - 15 “For the LORD spake thus to me with a strong hand, and instructed me that I should not walk in the way of this people, saying, ‘Say ye not, A confederacy, to all them to whom this people shall say, A confederacy; neither fear ye their fear, nor be afraid. Sanctify the LORD of hosts himself; and let him be your fear, and let him be your dread. And he shall be for a sanctuary; but for a stone of stumbling and for a rock of offence to both the houses of Israel, for a gin and for a snare to the inhabitants of Jerusalem. And many among them shall stumble, and fall, and be broken, and be snared, and be taken.”

¹²⁹⁰¹²⁹⁰ Peter is speaking of Jesus when he says in 1Peter 2:5 - 8 “Ye also, as lively stones, are built up an spiritual house (*i.e. a sanctuary*) an holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ. Wherefore also it is contained in the scripture, Behold, I lay in Sion a chief corner stone, elect, precious: and he that believeth on him shall not be confounded. Unto you therefore which believe he is precious: but unto them which be disobedient, the stone which the builders disallowed, the same is made the head of the corner, and a stone of stumbling, and a rock of offence, even to them which stumble at the word, being disobedient; whereunto also they were appointed.” Peter is quoting Isaiah 28:16 “Therefore thus saith the Lord GOD, Behold, I lay in Zion for a foundation a stone, a tried stone, a precious corner stone, a sure foundation: he that believeth shall not make haste.”

opportunity to look unto Jesus, the rock of our salvation and in faith to stand in awe of Him and not men. So, the psalmist:

“For thou art great, and doest wondrous things: thou art God alone.
Teach me thy way, O LORD;
I will walk in thy truth:
Unite my heart to fear thy name.
I will praise thee, O Lord my God, with all my heart:
And I will glorify thy name for evermore.”¹²⁹¹

Rejoicing in Affliction

¹⁶¹ Princes have persecuted me without a cause:
But my heart standeth in awe of thy word.
¹⁶² I rejoice at thy word,
As one that findeth great spoil.



When we look at verse 162 in the context of verse 161 we make a remarkable observation, the psalmist is rejoicing while he is being persecuted! Of course, it is obvious that he is not enjoying persecution. He testifies that, despite the evil intents of his detractors, he has chosen to stand in awe of God and not to fear men and that he rejoices in the very word that he stands in awe of. Whatever, we might ask, is the psalmist saying here? The key word that answers this question is given in the second part of the verse: “findeth.” As we read that word, it conjures up visions of a golden treasure that the psalmist has just uncovered. His rejoicing is not in the possession of some book of the Bible, but in the discovery of the truth contained in its pages. In short, although he does not tell us in so many words, God has spoken to him out of the page of Holy Writ. It is hearing the voice of God that has caused the psalmist’s troubled heart to rejoice, not observing some bit of abstract theological knowledge written on a page. The word that he stands in awe of has ‘come to life’ for him and in him. What he has wanted from the beginning – fellowship with God - has been tasted. Such an observation raises more questions. How can this be and why does he not tell us directly that God has spoken to him?

We have come to the threshold of considering the mystery of suffering. Suffering (like the unjust persecution mentioned in verse 160a) comes into all our lives. “Man is born unto trouble, as the sparks fly upward.”¹²⁹² Suffering comes for many reasons, some good and some bad. Death and the grief attendant on the loss of loved ones is certainly chief among the causes of suffering. Death is the execution of divine judgment against

¹²⁹¹ Psalm 86:10 -12

¹²⁹² Job 5:7

all sin. “Wherefore, as by one man (*Adam*) sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned.”¹²⁹³ But there is also God’s chastening for sin, directed toward His children for their good.¹²⁹⁴ In the psalmist’s case, as we noted in the previous lesson, his persecution is akin to the sufferings of Jesus and like those Jesus promised to all His followers. “The servant is not greater than his lord. If they have persecuted me, they will also persecute you”¹²⁹⁵ But the psalmist is rejoicing and not complaining. His reaction calls to mind the saying of Jesus, “Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake. Rejoice, and be exceeding glad: for great is your reward in heaven: for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you.”¹²⁹⁶ The casual reader of Jesus’ saying might suppose the source of rejoicing was the promised reward. That of course is true, but there is more. Exactly what is the promised reward? A golden nugget? The joy that the sufferer experiences is mainly because of the company that he now finds himself keeping. He knows in his affliction, that there were fellow sufferers before him, namely “the prophets.” And who were the prophets? They were men who stood in awe of God’s word and men who heard the voice of God, who had fellowship with God. And when they spoke forth the word that God gave them, men hated them and persecuted them without just cause because they spoke the truth. Men did this because “they are far from thy law” and “they seek not thy statutes.” The reward, then is not some materiality or some immateriality apart from God. The reward is God, Himself – fellowship with God that this psalm¹²⁹⁷ and Jesus¹²⁹⁸ both tell us is true blessedness. The rewards revealed by Jesus all center in God. It is God’s kingdom of heaven that the poor in spirit receive. It is God’s comfort that the mourners for sin receive. It is God’s earth that the meek inherit. It is God’s righteousness that fills the hungry seekers after it. It is God’s mercy that blesses those who, like Him, show mercy. It is those who have purified their hearts that are graced with the vision of God. It is those who stand between the collusion of violence and greed that are acknowledged to be the children of God Who is neither violent or greedy. And it is those who suffer persecution because they stand in awe of God’s word and fearlessly proclaim its truth

¹²⁹³ Romans 5:12

¹²⁹⁴ Hebrews 12:5 - 8 “And ye have forgotten the exhortation which speaketh unto you as unto children, My son, despise not thou the chastening of the Lord, nor faint when thou art rebuked of him: For whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth. If ye endure chastening, God dealeth with you as with sons; for what son is he whom the father chasteneth not? But if ye be without chastisement, whereof all are partakers, then are ye bastards, and not sons.”

¹²⁹⁵ John 15:20 - 25

¹²⁹⁶ Matthew 5:11 - 12

¹²⁹⁷ Psalm 119:1- 3 Blessed are the undefiled in the way, who walk in the law of the LORD. Blessed are they that keep his testimonies, and that seek him with the whole heart. They also do no iniquity: they walk in his ways.

¹²⁹⁸ Matthew 5:1 – 10 And seeing the multitudes, he went up into a mountain: and when he was set, his disciples came unto him: And he opened his mouth, and taught them, saying, Blessed are the poor in spirit: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are they that mourn: for they shall be comforted. Blessed are the meek: for they shall inherit the earth. Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness: for they shall be filled. Blessed are the merciful: for they shall obtain mercy. Blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see God. Blessed are the peacemakers: for they shall be called the children of God. Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness' sake: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

even in the smallest way that receive God's Kingdom of Heaven. The reward has value because it is of God.

So why then is the psalmist rejoicing in affliction? Because God has spoken to him and he has found that word in the scripture. But the word that he has "found" in scripture has been transferred from the field of the page to the treasury of his heart. This image is what lies behind Jesus' saying: "... the kingdom of heaven is like unto treasure hid in a field; the which when a man hath found, he hideth, and for joy thereof goeth and selleth all that he hath, and buyeth that field."¹²⁹⁹ This lies at the very heart of the spiritual life. If prayer is speaking to God, and hymnody is praising God, suffering is often His 'ill-wrapped' gift to us of His word that, in finding, becomes our own and opens to us a new and life transforming knowledge of God, Himself, a knowledge based on the fellowship of suffering with Him.

An Affair of the Heart

¹⁶³ I hate and abhor lying:
But thy law do I love.



In verse 163, the psalmist opens his heart to God (and to us). He tells us of two antithetical emotions: hate/abhor and love. Both are affective responses. The first (hate and abhor) looks back to 161a, "Princes have persecuted me without a cause." While the second looks back to 161b and 162, "My heart standeth in awe of thy word. I rejoice at thy word, as one that findeth great spoil." The first ellipsis is not so obvious, because the psalmist does not say I hate and abhor the princes who persecute me. What he resists and detests is the lying that is evident in their baseless justification for their persecution. Their persecution is without just cause but doubtless they have a promulgated a cause that is founded in lies about the psalmist. It this instance of untruth that throws the law of God into high relief. He loves the law because (unlike the princes) it is just and that justice is founded in truth. God is light¹³⁰⁰ and His Word is Truth.¹³⁰¹ But the picture is not entirely internal. The psalmist uses two words to describe his attitude toward lying or untruth. First, he hates it. The word translated "hate" is שָׂנֵא (pronounced saw-nay') a primitive root; to personally hate an enemy, who is hateful or odious. Besides beginning with ש, the word שָׂנֵא can mean to be against something because it is an enemy.¹³⁰² It suggests a more external demeanor or mode of

¹²⁹⁹ Matthew 13:44 Again, the kingdom of heaven is like unto treasure hid in a field; the which when a man hath found, he hideth, and for joy thereof goeth and selleth all that he hath, and buyeth that field.

¹³⁰⁰ 1 John 1:5 This then is the message which we have heard of him, and declare unto you, that God is light, and in him is no darkness at all.

¹³⁰¹ John 14:6 Jesus saith unto him, I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me.

¹³⁰² Goldingay translates 162 – 163:

I exult over your statement

behavior. Then he says that abhors lying. The word translated “abhor” is תעב (pronounced *taw-ab*) another primitive root meaning to loathe, to detest morally. The emphasis is more internal. The two are linked, the external response flowing from the internal revulsion. He hates untruth because it is his enemy. Untruth is his enemy because it is morally abhorrent. But his attitude toward lying is also a testimony to his love of God’s law. The two are entirely compatible like two sides of the same coin.

But this verse suggests more than just the suffering of one unjustly persecuted. The psalmist’s suffering is particular instance of a much wider conflict, a warfare between truth and falsehood. It is this fight which proceeds “tooth (צ) and nail.” But this is not a physical warfare, nor is the tooth a physical one. It is a spiritual battle. And it has always been that way. “For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places.”¹³⁰³ The lie brings spiritual bondage. It was a half-truth that convinced Eve to disregard her husband’s warning not to eat of the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Her eyes were opened to know good and evil just as the serpent told her, but what he did not tell her was that she would know good without the power to do it and evil without the power to refrain from doing it.¹³⁰⁴ It was a half-truth and the lie was contained by the omission of the whole truth. So instead of freedom, both she and her husband experienced the bitterness of spiritual bondage that a lie brings. The truth of God, however, brings freedom. “Ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.”¹³⁰⁵

like someone who finds much plunder
Whereas I am against falsehood and abhor it,
I am dedicated to your teaching

¹³⁰³ Ephesians 6:12

¹³⁰⁴ Genesis 3:1 – 7 “Now the serpent was more subtle than any beast of the field which the LORD God had made. And he said unto the woman, Yea, hath God said, Ye shall not eat of every tree of the garden? And the woman said unto the serpent, We may eat of the fruit of the trees of the garden: But of the fruit of the tree which is in the midst of the garden, God hath said, Ye shall not eat of it, neither shall ye touch it, lest ye die. And the serpent said unto the woman, Ye shall not surely die: For God doth know that in the day ye eat thereof, then your eyes shall be opened, and ye shall be as gods, knowing good and evil.

And when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was pleasant to the eyes, and a tree to be desired to make one wise, she took of the fruit thereof, and did eat, and gave also unto her husband with her; and he did eat. And the eyes of them both were opened, and they knew that they were naked; and they sewed fig leaves together, and made themselves aprons.

¹³⁰⁵ This saying comes from a much longer passage (John 8:31- 45) which describes the discourse between the Pharisees and Jesus. The passage is germane because the nature of the persecution that Jesus suffered is similar to that of the psalmist, and it also reveals how great topics like freedom vs. bondage, truth vs. a lie, and faith vs. unbelief play together in this cosmic struggle.

“Then said Jesus to those Jews which believed on him, ‘If ye continue in my word, then are ye my disciples indeed; And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.’ They answered him, ‘We be Abraham’s seed, and were never in bondage to any man: how sayest thou, Ye shall be made free?’ Jesus answered them, ‘Verily, verily, I say unto you, Whosoever committeth sin is the servant of sin. And the servant abideth not in the house for ever: but the Son abideth ever. If the Son therefore shall make you free, ye shall be free indeed. I know that ye are Abraham’s seed; but ye seek to kill me, because my word hath no place in you. I speak that which I have seen with my Father: and ye do that which ye have seen with your father.’ They answered and said unto him, ‘Abraham is our father.’ Jesus saith unto them, ‘If ye were Abraham’s children, ye would do the works of Abraham. But now ye seek to kill me, a man that hath told you the truth, which I have heard of God: this did not Abraham. Ye do the deeds of your father.’ Then said they to him, ‘We be not born of fornication; we have one Father, even God.’ Jesus said unto them, ‘If God were your Father, ye would love me: for I proceeded forth and came from God; neither came I of myself, but he sent me. Why do ye not

This conflict is not just a cosmic battle fought between some far distant “forces of good” against “forces of evil.” For the psalmist (and for us) it is part of our everyday lives. Lies abound in society today just as they did in the psalmist’s day. And those lies bring emotional, psychological, moral, financial, and even physical bondage today just as they always have. The person who breaks the law that the psalmist so reveres and loves, becomes just as much the slave of sin in our day as they did in the psalmist’s. The tooth (our tooth), therefore, is part of that battle insofar that it too is involved not with biting but with speaking – speaking the truth. The receipt of the truth is the receipt of a stewardship of the truth. The faith by which we receive the truth, is also the fidelity with which we exercise that stewardship. So that even as we have received Christ, the Truth, by faith so we are constrained to walk in Him by love.¹³⁰⁶ The life we are called to live is a life empowered by God’s love shed abroad in our hearts. It is a heart affair. And nowhere does love shine so brightly than in the sacrifices it is willing to make in spiritual warfare. This is not just a battle of great swelling conflicts. More often is a word of truth and love spoken almost without awareness that brings freedom from fear and new life to a dying heart.

The Discipline of Devotion

¹⁶⁴ Seven times a day do I praise thee
Because of thy righteous judgments.



In verse 161, the psalmist presented us with the externals of his spiritual struggle, as well as the choice that he made to fear God and not those who persecuted him. In verse 162 he opened his heart to reveal the internal source of the joy that he experienced during this trial. He rejoiced because hearing the voice of God speaking to him out of the pages of Scripture was like finding a great treasure hidden in a field. In verse 163, the psalmist went even further in opening his heart to God (and us) as he testified of his love for God and his hatred of untruth which marks Satanic attempts at oppression by means of a lie. In the verse before us the psalmist reveals a very important devotional practice as well as a spiritual principle that is critical for winning the conflict with untruth in which he (and we) are actively engaged all the days of our earthly pilgrimage. “Seven times a day do I praise thee.” Normal devotional practice is usually constrained to morning and evening exercises in prayer and meditation, quiet times alone with God before the day begins and after the day has ended. The former is often

understand my speech? Even because ye cannot hear my word. **Ye are of your father the devil, and the lusts of your father ye will do. He was a murderer from the beginning, and abode not in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaketh a lie, he speaketh of his own: for he is a liar, and the father of it.** And because I tell you the truth, ye believe me not.”

¹³⁰⁶ Colossians 2:6 - 7 As ye have therefore received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk ye in him: rooted and built up in him, and stablished in the faith, as ye have been taught, abounding therein with thanksgiving.

focused on our need for God's grace before the spiritual struggles come and the latter on forgiveness for the almost inevitable defeats and setbacks that have occurred during the day. Perhaps one might even rise to prayer three times a day as in the case of Daniel.¹³⁰⁷ But I do not believe that the psalmist is here referring to set times for prayer. Rather he is describing his prayer life as continual. The number seven occurs quite often in prophetic utterances as a number of completion. So, it is not too hard to understand that the number seven here signifies that the psalmist's life is completely given over to prayer, partly because he feels there is nothing else for him to do, being utterly cast upon the mercy of God for deliverance from his persecutors. We see this play on numbers in Peter's question to Jesus about forgiveness.

*"Then came Peter to him, and said, 'Lord, how oft shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? Till seven times?' Jesus saith unto him, 'I say not unto thee, until seven times: but, until seventy times seven.'"*¹³⁰⁸

Peter is looking for a numeric limit to forgiveness so that he can justify taking action against his offender. By setting the bar far higher using the same numeric structure, Jesus is not using the number as a threshold but as a symbol of boundless mercy that is the hallmark of divine dealings with all humanity. God's forgiveness is without bound ("til seventy times seven" ~ boundless) so that we see the numerical structure not as a limit but as conveying the concept of limitlessness. So too here the phrase "seven times a day" while perhaps describing the actual temporal practice of the psalmist, is primarily using the number to convey an attitude toward prayer that is continual and without temporal limit. The Apostle Paul describes this concept in a more Grecian fashion when he says tells the Thessalonians to "Pray without ceasing."¹³⁰⁹

But why should such a practice be important? On one level, it is a manifestation of devotion to God and His "righteous judgments." What the psalmist is telling us is that

¹³⁰⁷ Daniel 6:10 - 11 Now when Daniel knew that the writing was signed, he went into his house; and his windows being open in his chamber toward Jerusalem, he kneeled upon his knees three times a day, and prayed, and gave thanks before his God, as he did aforetime. Then these men assembled, and found Daniel praying and making supplication before his God.

¹³⁰⁸ Matthew 18:21-22

¹³⁰⁹ 1Thessalonians 5:17 This saying of Paul has occasioned much discussion, particularly in the Eastern Orthodox confessions as to its exact meaning. The whole school of Hesychasm (which means "stillness") has grown up around this verse. Perhaps the most popular explanation of the discipline is contained in the little book the Way of a Pilgrim that records the experiences of a simple person who, in seeking the explanation of what Paul meant in this verse, discovers the "Jesus Prayer" ("Lord Jesus Christ, be merciful to me a sinner") embedded in the anthology of spiritual classics compiled by Nicodemus of Mount Athos in Greece. That anthology, the Philokalea (which means "love of beauty"), was translated into Slavonic and later into Russian by Theophan the Recluse. It is this translation that the "pilgrim" finds, reads, and is guided by as he undertakes the continual recitation of the "Jesus" prayer. The Way of the Pilgrim documents his many experiences as he grows spiritually by means of reading the Philokalea, reciting the Jesus prayer, and living the life of a wandering pilgrim. The point of continual recitation of the Jesus Prayer is to refocus the heart on the person of Jesus in constant adoration, and is not unlike the discipline of the psalmist in the verse before us. The danger with the repetition of the Jesus prayer in Hesychasm (or any other short but memorable prayer – and there are many in the literature) is that the practitioner unguided by a competent spiritual director comes to think that obtaining spiritual advancement is a simple affair based on repetition. Nothing could be farther from the truth. Nevertheless, Paul's admonition still stands before us to pray continually and repetitious short prayers can, if kept apart from 'vain repetition', can be very beneficial to keep us focused on God and to help us to sanctify the Lord God in our hearts.

he has a choice of reflecting on the unjust actions of his persecutors or on the righteous judgments of God, and that he has chosen to do the latter. In so doing he has chosen to praise God for His righteous judgments rather than curse the princes for their unjust persecution. In short, the solicitation of any evil to “pay attention to me and not to God” has failed, and will continue to fail, because the psalmist has steadfastly refused to take his eyes off God and to survey evil instead. And it is in this constancy that the secret of spiritual victory lies. This is not a single spiritual battle. It is an ongoing process that just does not stop. As the solicitation of evil that would distract the believer from God is constant, so the response must be constant. The response of prayer is ideally suited to this kind of struggle, because prayer focusses the mind and heart on the One being addressed while praise focusses the heart and mind on the goodness of the One being praised. The psalmist is telling us that as the struggle with those lies that he abominates is constant, so he must maintain his continual focus on God. It should be obvious that this struggle can be won only by the grace of God in answer to the prayer of faith. But the evil’s intent has always been to interrupt the soul’s communion with God by means of distraction. And this the psalmist will not acquiesce to. The victory over evil’s solicitations to abandon God is manifest partly in the internal affective state of the soul.¹³¹⁰ Evil seeks to engender the fear of men in the heart and to trouble the mind with questions like ‘why is this happening to me?’ It is no wonder that the Apostle Peter counsels that “But and if ye suffer for righteousness’ sake, happy are ye: and be not afraid of their terror, neither be troubled. But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts:...”¹³¹¹ In the next verse, the psalmist testifies to the consequences of his continual prayer of praise. “Great peace have they which love thy law: and nothing shall offend them.” Jesus, Himself, tells His followers, “Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you: not as the world giveth, give I unto you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid.”¹³¹² The phrase “let not” suggests that while Jesus’ great peace is given to us, there is something that we must do to appropriate it. The answer both to what must we do and what the psalmist is telling us of his experience is found in Paul’s admonition to the Philippians. “Be careful for nothing; but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God. And the peace of God, which passes all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.”¹³¹³

¹³¹⁰ It is the author’s experience that the act of sustained praise (uninterrupted for a few minutes) also has the effect of changing our emotional mood from fearful to trusting, from sad to joyous, from doubtful to believing, and from troubled to peaceful.

¹³¹¹ 1Peter 3:14 – 15a Sanctify as used here is not the usual theological meaning. The believer cannot ‘sanctify’ the Lord God in that sense seeing that He is impeccably and immutably holy. What the apostle means is that we keep our view of God separate from the any other vision of our world. We might say that we always maintain ‘a special place in our heart for God’ so that when we lift up our eyes in prayer we are like the disciples on the mount of transfiguration who “... when they had lifted up their eyes, they saw no man, save Jesus only.” (Matthew 17:8)

¹³¹² John 14:27

¹³¹³ Philippians 4:6 - 7

The Peace of Perseverance

¹⁶⁵ Great peace have they which love thy law:
And nothing shall offend them.



This verse describes yet another piece of the affective spectrum of the psalmist's heart. In verse 161b we had great awe. "My heart standeth in awe of thy word." In verse 162 we had great joy. "I rejoice at thy word, as one that findeth great spoil." In verse 163b we had great love. "Thy law do I love." In the verse before us we have great peace. "Great peace have they which love thy law." Taken together, the affective spectra, awe/joy/love/peace, is most remarkable for one against whom Princes have plotted to unjustly persecute. In each case the root of the profound emotional response is not to the externals of the threat but the internal relationship of the psalmist with the word of God (awe/love), particularly the law (love/peace). Verse 165b further defines the greatness of the peace referenced. Nothing can offend one who loves the law of God. Nothing certainly refers back to the first verse which cites unjust persecution. Even man's most virulent attacks cannot disturb the psalmist's inner peace. But 165b, however, hints at a more serious spiritual problem in its use of "offend." The word translated "offend" in the KJV is **מכשול** (pronounced mik-shole') the masculine form of **כשל** (pronounced kaw-shal') a primitive root meaning to totter or waver. Hence **מכשול** (*miksol*) is often translated as a stumbling-block or to stumble. Goldingay notes, however, that the "NRSV and TNIV have 'stumble', but *kasal* (here the noun *miksol*) does not suggest losing one's footing so as not to recover in a way that might be momentary, but falling so as not to be able to recover. The psalm again presupposes the image of the way that we walk. For all the hazards of the path, we will be able to walk it."¹³¹⁴ So the great peace of which the psalmist speaks relates to the absence of the fear of falling as in apostasy.¹³¹⁵ The significant difference between the undertone of this passage when compared with the passage on apostasy in Hebrews is that while the writer to the Hebrews asserts that "it is impossible for those who were once enlightened,... if they shall fall away, to renew them again unto repentance; here the psalmist tells us that, for those who truly love God and his word, it is impossible to fall. Therefore, there is no need to fear that external circumstances, however trying, can ever separate us from God in Whom we

¹³¹⁴ Goldingay Psalms Vol 3, page 440.

¹³¹⁵ The irreversibility of the "fall" of apostasy is described in Hebrews 6:4 - 6 "For it is impossible for those who were once enlightened, and have tasted of the heavenly gift, and were made partakers of the Holy Ghost, and have tasted the good word of God, and the powers of the world to come, if they shall fall away, to renew them again unto repentance; seeing they crucify to themselves the Son of God afresh, and put him to an open shame."

have placed our trust.¹³¹⁶ The Apostle Paul similarly suggests this confidence when he tells us:

“If God be for us, who can be against us? He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things? Who shall lay anything to the charge of God’s elect? It is God that justifies. Who is he that condemns? It is Christ that died, yea rather, that is risen again, who is even at the right hand of God, who also makes intercession for us. Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? As it is written, ‘For thy sake we are killed all the day long; we are accounted as sheep for the slaughter.’ Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him that loved us. For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.”¹³¹⁷

Jude puts it more succinctly,

“Now unto him that is able to keep you from falling, and to present you faultless before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy, to the only wise God our Savior, be glory and majesty, dominion and power, both now and ever. Amen.”¹³¹⁸

The psalmist’s peace rests not in self-confidence but in God, Who, (we might say with another psalmist¹³¹⁹) is ‘holding the psalmist’s hand’ as any parent does a small child to prevent a serious fall. There is, of course, a possibility for any believer to fall but not in an irreversible way. We see this fall described in the criticism of Ephesus. *“Nevertheless, I have somewhat against thee, because thou hast left thy first love. Remember therefore from whence thou art fallen, and repent...”¹³²⁰* The principle of the Christian life lies not in justification by the works of the law but *“faith which worketh by love.”¹³²¹* In the

¹³¹⁶ Nevertheless, the writer to the Hebrews would not have addressed the problem if it were not a real possibility. Taken together with Jesus’ parabolic references to the seed sown in shallow earth that for want of depth withers and dies under the intense sun of persecution, these passages suggest that the problem of apostasy is indicative of a presumed work of God’s saving grace when there has, in fact, been none because of the absence of actual faith (i.e. the hard substrate of unbelief in the heart that prevents the seedling from drawing sustenance from the very word of God from which the psalmist draws awe, joy, love, and peace). The Apostate appears to believe but, in fact, still retains a hardened heart untouched by God’s saving grace. He will eventually fall. The irreversibility of this fall is not that he has lost his chance for salvation, but that his heart that has remained hardened in unbelief against God for reasons interior to the unbeliever. The assertion of the psalmist that “Salvation is far from the wicked: for they seek not thy statutes” (155) hints at this terrible spiritual condition. This is clearly not the case with the psalmist whose confident faith in God has supported him in his trials and remains the reason for the irreversible grace of God being active in his life as evidenced by the remarkable affective spectra that we have noted.

¹³¹⁷ Romans 8:31b - 39

¹³¹⁸ Jude 1:24 - 25

¹³¹⁹ Psalm 37:23 - 24 The steps of a good man are ordered by the LORD: and he delighteth in his way. Though he fall, he shall not be utterly cast down: for the LORD upholdeth him with his hand.

¹³²⁰ Revelation 2:4 - 5a

¹³²¹ Galatians 5:1 - 6 “Stand fast therefore in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free, and be not entangled again with the yoke of bondage. Behold, I Paul say unto you, that if ye be circumcised, Christ shall profit you nothing. For I testify again to every man that is circumcised, that he is a debtor to do the whole law. Christ is become of no effect unto you, whosoever of you are

Galatian passage cited, Paul tells the believers that if they return to keeping the law (as the 'Judaizers' or syncretists wanted them to) instead of trusting Jesus completely they have "fallen from grace." His term "fallen from grace" describes much the same thing as "leaving your first love." Paul is speaking to genuine believers in this passage and nowhere does he say that such a fall from grace is totally irreversible only that it is totally unprofitable in the spiritual life.

Finally, though the psalmist makes much of keeping the law, he clearly knows, like Paul, that such an approach will not ultimately yield the desired end of fellowship with God apart from God's grace in answer to his faith. It was Abraham, long before the psalmist, who demonstrated that "the just shall live by faith" for the psalmist and for us. And it is ultimately that faith in God's word that draws forth the grace which is the true source of the psalmist's awe, joy, love, and peace.

The Hope of Obedience

¹⁶⁶ LORD, I have hoped for thy salvation,
And done thy commandments.



This verse begins with the fourth of six statements that the psalmist makes about the LORD's salvation. ¹³²² With the exception of the psalmist's statement that salvation is far from the wicked (155), his statements all reflect intense longing. His "eyes fail for thy salvation." He has constantly "hoped for thy salvation." And he has "longed for thy salvation." As we noted elsewhere, the psalmist probably saw the LORD's salvation as a divine act of deliverance from painful and threatening circumstances. The tenor of the entire psalm also tells us that salvation for him meant renewed and even everlasting fellowship with God which he saw as life, as reflected in his constant plea, "quicken thou me." ¹³²³ Bearing in mind that שׁ (shin) means defense, we can draw two

justified by the law; **ye are fallen from grace.** For we through the Spirit wait for the hope of righteousness by faith. **For in Jesus Christ neither circumcision availeth any thing, nor uncircumcision; but faith which worketh by love."**

¹³²² The word translated "salvation is "שׁוּעָה" (pronounced yeshuw`ah). It is evocative of the name "Jesus" which is the Greek form of the name Joshua. The name means 'the salvation of יְהוָה (the LORD)' Who we customarily refer to as Jehovah. So, the name Jesus means, in effect, what the psalmist is hoping for here, "the salvation of the LORD." The references are:

Ps 119:41 Let thy mercies come also unto me, O LORD, even thy salvation (תְּשׁוּעָה), according to thy word.

Ps 119:81 My soul fainteth for thy salvation (תְּשׁוּעָה): but I hope in thy word.

Ps 119:123 Mine eyes fail for thy salvation (יְשׁוּעָה), and for the word of thy righteousness.

Ps 119:155 Salvation (יְשׁוּעָה) is far from the wicked: for they seek not thy statutes.

Ps 119:166 LORD, I have hoped for thy salvation (יְשׁוּעָה), and done thy commandments.

Ps 119:174 I have longed for thy salvation (יְשׁוּעָה), O LORD; and thy law is my delight.

¹³²³ Which he repeats nine times in this psalm:

Ps 119:25 My soul cleaveth unto the dust: quicken thou me according to thy word.

Ps 119:37 Turn away mine eyes from beholding vanity; and quicken thou me in thy way. {Turn...: Heb. Make to pass}

Ps 119:40 Behold, I have longed after thy precepts: quicken me in thy righteousness.

Ps 119:88 Quicken me after thy lovingkindness; so shall I keep the testimony of thy mouth.

Ps 119:107 I am afflicted very much: quicken me, O LORD, according unto thy word.

observations out of these petitions and testimonies of affection and hope. First, the issue of the struggle in which the psalmist is engaged, involves (eternal) life or death. Either the psalmist will enjoy that fellowship with God of which he spoke when he opened this psalm or he will not. The stakes could not be higher. Second, he knows that the successful outcome of his struggle with the wicked ultimately depends upon God. He hopes for the salvation of the LORD.¹³²⁴ His hope of salvation rests with the grace and mercy of God (41). His plea is ever, “quicken THOU me.” God alone can give life.

But this verse is also the first of a set of three verses that end this octave, all focused in part on the Psalmist’s past performance. “... I have ... done thy commandments.” (166b) “My soul hath kept thy testimonies” (167b) “I have kept thy precepts and thy testimonies.” (168a) He is telling God (and us) exactly what he means when he says: “all my ways are before thee.” Throughout this octave we have seen the courageous and wise choices that the psalmist has made in the face of spiritual combat, and we can understand, therefore, why he emphasizes his past actions. But, as we have noted often before, the covenantal relationship between Israel (in general) and the psalmist (in particular) is not a *quid pro quo* relationship. The psalmist hopes in God because God is God, not because he has gotten his part of some human/divine bargain right. Obedience to God has always been the rule of the spiritual life, then as now, but while the psalmist may tell God that he has kept the testimonies and done the commandments, he still knows that his obedience is imperfect and that his knowledge is in part. Whatever has he been doing then and why?

If one were to ask a soldier why they are fighting a war, we might find many answers: love of home, of country, for material gain, for adventure, or many other reasons. But in this most important struggle (from eternity’s point of view), the psalmist has been doing what he knows to do to win the battle: standing in awe of God’s word, focusing on the fear of God rather than men, and dwelling constantly in prayer and meditation on the treasure of God’s communication as if they were the spoils of war. He does these things because of his awe and love of God and has peace and joy at the thought of God’s faithfulness. It is these powerful affective motivations that are the driving force of his actions. He does what he can do because the grace of God has been active in his heart. And the affective spectrum which we considered in the last lesson, is clearly a gift of God. What is important for us to realize is that we are also engaged our whole lives in just such a struggle with adversaries and evil men, far from God, who want to

Ps 119:149 Hear my voice according unto thy lovingkindness: O LORD, quicken me according to thy judgment.

Ps 119:154 Plead my cause, and deliver me: quicken me according to thy word.

Ps 119:156 Great are thy tender mercies, O LORD: quicken me according to thy judgments. {Great: or, Many}

Ps 119:159 Consider how I love thy precepts: quicken me, O LORD, according to thy lovingkindness.

¹³²⁴ Jonah 2:8 - 10 They that observe lying vanities forsake their own mercy. But I will sacrifice unto thee with the voice of thanksgiving; I will pay that that I have vowed. Salvation is of the LORD. And the LORD spake unto the fish, and it vomited out Jonah upon the dry land.

control the souls of men, including ours. They may attempt this through physical or emotional violence and certainly lies and untruth. The battle is the same for us as it was for the psalmist. What the psalmist does by God's grace, we do well to emulate. His hope in God's salvation is the same for us. It is just that he, perhaps, saw salvation as a specific act of divine intervention in time and space,¹³²⁵ while we know that the Salvation of the LORD is a person – Jesus. To borrow the words of Martin Luther:

“Did we in our own strength confide, our striving would be losing,
Were not the right Man on our side, the Man of God's own choosing,
Dost ask who that may be? Christ Jesus, it is He;
Lord Sabaoth, His Name, from age to age the same,
And He must win the battle.”

As was said in the introduction to this octave, Jesus' overcoming “is integral to His experience of our humanity. In His birth, He overcomes our finitude and becomes our brother. In His death on the cross, He overcomes our moral failure and becomes our Savior. In His resurrection, He overcomes our fatality and becomes our Life. In His intercession as our High Priest, He overcomes our frailty and becomes our present sanctification. In His return, He will overcome our forlornness as our Bridegroom. We overcome because He has overcome. His victory is ours.” He is the salvation of the LORD for which both the psalmist and we hope, and for whom we both strive.

The Treasury of Hope

¹⁶⁶ LORD, I have hoped for thy salvation,
And done thy commandments.

¹⁶⁷ My soul hath kept thy testimonies;
and I love them exceedingly.

¹⁶⁸ I have kept thy precepts and thy testimonies:
for all my ways are before thee.



In these verses the psalmist speaks to God's commandments, testimonies, and precepts. Commandments are directed toward the governance of the will, so the psalmist says I have done them.¹³²⁶ Testimonies and precepts are directed toward the enlightenment and guidance of the mind, so the psalmist says I have kept them.¹³²⁷ Commandments tell us what God expects of us in relationship. Precepts tell us something about how God thinks and how He wants us to think. Testimonies tell us something about how God sees situations, and particularly (if we can back this out) His vision in general. So,

¹³²⁵ We do well to remember the impatience in Psalm 119:126 “It is time for thee, LORD, to work: for they have made void thy law.”

¹³²⁶ עשה (pronounced aw-saw') a primitive root; meaning to do or make in the broadest sense and widest application, to accomplish.

¹³²⁷ שמר (pronounced shaw-mar') a primitive root meaning, properly, to hedge about (as with thorns) or to guard; generally, to protect, to attend to, to take heed to (as regards oneself).

when the psalmist says a second time I have kept thy testimonies (168a), it serves as a basis for his following assertion that “all my ways are before thee.” He knows from the testimonies of God that nothing can be hid from His sight. “... all things are naked and opened unto the eyes of him with whom we have to do.”¹³²⁸ Commandments point to obedience, as we noted previously, while precepts and testimonies deal with the reasons why particular actions are necessary and appropriate. God does not just desire obedience, but rather intelligent obedience or reasonable service.¹³²⁹ Not just the will is involved in obedience, but the mind and the emotions are as well. In the ideal case, we obey God because we love Him and we understand why He wills certain actions and how those actions testify of our understanding of His mind and our commitment to His will.

Commandments and precepts are general. But God’s testimonies are immensely personal and situation specific. In them we hear the voice of God’s love and wisdom most clearly. When the psalmist said “I rejoice at thy word, as one that findeth great spoil” (162), doubtless, he included this most particular and personal communication that inevitably carries with it a sense of God’s nearness to us, especially in times of trouble and with it a sense of His great love that is deeply concerned for our good. So that when the psalmist tells God that he has kept God’s testimonies because he loves them, they (along with statutes, law (Torah – literally: teaching), and precepts) are all part of the treasure of God’s word that he has found and rejoices in because they are more precious than gold.¹³³⁰

But what does all this mean to the psalmist personally? It is very simple to see that his service is intelligent, heart-felt, and determined. It is also obvious that such actions together with their affective and cognitive substrate are necessary but not sufficient to winning the spiritual struggle. He is not rehearsing these things in order to remind God of what is already in front of Him. Nor is he just looking for some reward based on faithful service. Again, the pinnacle of the psalmist’s thinking centers in God’s faithfulness, the LORD’s salvation for which he hopes. If the actions cited are not buttress some claim for reward, then what are they for? Why does he speak of them? Surely God knows what the psalmist has done (and not done). This passage has about it the sense of self-speech. The psalmist is clearly talking to God, but he is also talking to

¹³²⁸ Hebrews 4:12 – 13 “For the word of God is quick, and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart. Neither is there any creature that is not manifest in his sight: but all things are naked and opened unto the eyes of him with whom we have to do.”

¹³²⁹ The Apostle Paul makes reference to this when he tells the Roman Christians “I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service.” (Romans 12:1)

¹³³⁰ Ps 119:71 - 72 “It is good for me that I have been afflicted; that I might learn thy statutes. The law (i.e. the Torah or teaching of right and wrong) of thy mouth is better unto me than thousands of gold and silver.

Ps 119:125 – 128 I am thy servant; give me understanding, that I may know thy testimonies. It is time for thee, LORD, to work: for they have made void thy law. Therefore, I love thy commandments above gold; yea, above fine gold. Therefore, I esteem all thy precepts concerning all things to be right; and I hate every false way.

himself. In rehearsing his volitional, emotional and cognitive history with God as experienced in relation to God's word, he is assuring himself that the God who has spoken to him so particularly in commands and precepts, and especially in personal testimony, would not do so were it not for His ongoing love for the psalmist. In the final analysis the psalmist says these things because he is trusting in the love of God for him, a love that will never let him fall irremediably from faith nor fail to win the victory of salvation that the psalmist hopes for. He is, in these verses, doing what the Bible tells us that David did: "David encouraged himself in the LORD his God."¹³³¹ This is a remarkable property of the scriptures. If we take them to heart and enter into them, then they will be a continual source of encouragement and hope. "For whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the scriptures might have hope."¹³³² Awe at God's word, joy at His testimonies, love for His commands, and peace through that love, all speak of the nearness of the Person of God; of His upholding hand, His guiding eye, His loving heart, and His unfathomable wisdom. These are the treasures of the heart that support the psalmist's hope for the salvation of the LORD.

There remains some ambiguity in the last verse. In what spirit does the psalmist maintain that "all my ways are before thee"? Does he say this with the misplaced self-confidence of a Pharisee? Or does he say this as one fearful that, "If thou, LORD, shouldest mark iniquities, O Lord, who shall stand?"¹³³³ We have already observed that these statements could not be part of a *quid pro quo* bargain. The psalmist, who began with "O that my ways were directed to keep thy statutes! Then shall I not be ashamed, ... "¹³³⁴ and ends with "I have gone astray like a lost sheep; seek thy servant..."¹³³⁵ could hardly be accused of Pharisaic self-confidence. Nor should we believe that his fear of the LORD is equivalent to a hopeless fatalism, else why would he say "I have hoped for thy salvation"? The psalmist knows that the God who loves him has His eye on him for guidance, protection and good. There is no moral valuation inherent in his assertion that "all my ways are before thee." Rather, the psalmist knows that God says, "I will instruct thee and teach thee in the way which thou shalt go: I will guide thee with mine eye {Hebrew: I will counsel thee, mine eye shall be upon thee}. Here again, the very last statement is, in truth, a testimony of the psalmist's confidence in a loving God who is watching out for him to bring him to the desired salvation and to eternal fellowship with Himself.

¹³³¹ 1 Samuel 30:6 And David was greatly distressed; for the people spake of stoning him, because the soul of all the people was grieved, every man for his sons and for his daughters: but David encouraged himself in the LORD his God.

¹³³² Romans 15:4

¹³³³ Psalm 130:3

¹³³⁴ Verse 5, 6a

¹³³⁵ Verse 174a

ⲧ (TAU)

☩ *The Psalmist's Plea for Deliverance "According to Thy Word"* ☩

- 169 Let my cry come near before thee, O LORD:
Give me understanding according to thy word.
170 Let my supplication come before thee:
Deliver me according to thy word.

☩ *The Psalmist as a Witness of God's Wisdom and Glory* ☩

- 171 My lips shall utter praise,
When thou hast taught me thy statutes
172 My tongue shall speak of thy word:
For all thy commandments are righteousness.

☩ *The Psalmist's Heart and Life* ☩

- 173 Let thine hand help me;
For I have chosen thy precepts.
174 I have longed for thy salvation, O LORD;
And thy law is my delight.

☩ *A Lost and Dying Sheep that the Shepherd Values* ☩

- 175 Let my soul live, and it shall praise thee;
And let thy judgments help me.
176 I have gone astray like a lost sheep; seek thy servant;
For I do not forget thy commandments

☩

ⲧ - **Tau** means a sign or a mark as in a property boundary. As the last letter of the Hebrew alphabet, it has the sense of the sign marking the end of things like the end (i.e. the edge) of a person's property, or the end of a person's life. The end of a thing is often a good time to summarize, to look back and find the meaning of what has gone before. The writer to the Hebrews, for example, does this after a long discourse on the role of the high priest as a type of Christ.¹³³⁶ What we do not see, however, is surprising. While the psalmist pleads for salvation (deliver me, help me, I have longed for thy salvation, let my soul live, seek thy servant), there is no reference to those who have spoken against him or persecuted him without a cause. The psalmist is not pleading for salvation from some external enemy, but from an internal condition.

¹³³⁶ Hebrews 8:1 "Now of the things which we have spoken this is the sum: We have such an high priest, who is set on the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens." The little phrase "this is the sum" refers back to the long discourse in Hebrews 4:14 – Hebrews 8:1, a total of sixty-four verses including the long parenthetical on the spiritual dullness of his hearers.

The structure of this octave consists of four two-stanza couplets. The first is a two-fold plea for deliverance founded on understanding “according to thy word.” (169b, 170b) If relationship with the LORD is to be preserved, then His communication must be understood. The light of God’s word must shine in darkness of the heart and the darkness must comprehend it! ¹³³⁷ Deliverance from spiritual darkness comes through the understanding of God’s word, an understanding that finds faith essential.

The second two stanza couplet involves the psalmist’s communication, but not exclusively with God. True the psalmist’s “lips shall utter praise” when his “tongue shall speak of thy word” because “thou hast taught me thy statutes.” But there are those who will listen to his testimony and discover that “all thy commandments are righteousness.” The wayward sheep will become the pilgrim evangelist! Communication is a two-way street and relationship with God depends on it being so. As God speaks to us: to forgive, to enlighten, and to encourage; even so, we must speak to others: to forgive, to enlighten, and to encourage even as we praise Him for His excellent mercy and His impeccable righteousness.

The third two verse couplet gives us a glimpse into the heart of the psalmist: “I have chosen thy precepts. I have longed for thy salvation, O LORD; and thy law is my delight.” What we see as a glimpse, God sees altogether. God looks continually upon the heart.¹³³⁸ What God saw in the psalmist, for all his sins and errors, was a man that sought the LORD with all his heart.¹³³⁹ The psalmist was not asking God to do for him what he could do for himself. His faith was expressed in not only in his desire but in his choice of God’s way of thinking (I have chosen thy precepts). The psalmist cries out for what he cannot do. “Let thine hand help me” might well have been Peter’s cry to Jesus when he sank beneath the waves after trusting Jesus in walking on the water.¹³⁴⁰

The last couplet presents a summary of the psalmist’s relationship in a way not heretofore mentioned: a lost and dying sheep that the shepherd values. “Let my soul live ... I have gone astray like a lost sheep.” It is not enough to have God’s word, the psalmist knows that he needs God, Himself: “Let my soul live ... seek thy servant.” In

¹³³⁷ And not as it was said of David’s greater Son “And the light shineth in darkness; and the darkness comprehended it not.” John 1:5

¹³³⁸ 1 Samuel 16:7 But the LORD said unto Samuel, Look not on his (*i.e. David’s bigger brother*) countenance, or on the height of his stature; because I have refused him: for the LORD seeth not as man seeth; for man looketh on the outward appearance, but the LORD looketh on the heart. (*i.e. the heart of David*)

¹³³⁹ 1 Samuel 13:14 But now (*Samuel speaking to Saul for his disobedience*) thy kingdom shall not continue: the LORD hath sought him a man after his own heart, (*i.e. David*) and the LORD hath commanded him to be captain over his people, because thou hast not kept that which the LORD commanded thee. We find a kindred spirit in King Josiah. “... king Josiah ... in Jerusalem ... like unto him was there no king before him, that turned to the LORD with all his heart, and with all his soul, and with all his might, according to all the law of Moses; neither after him arose there any like him.” 2 Kings 23:23 (extracted) & 25

¹³⁴⁰ Matthew 14:28-31 And Peter answered him and said, Lord, if it be thou, bid me come unto thee on the water. And he said, Come. And when Peter was come down out of the ship, he walked on the water, to go to Jesus. But when he saw the wind boisterous, he was afraid; and beginning to sink, he cried, saying, Lord, save me. And immediately Jesus stretched forth his hand, and caught him, and said unto him, O thou of little faith, wherefore didst thou doubt?

the end, relationship is not just about words but about persons. When two lovers meet, sometimes words are unnecessary. It is interesting to speculate what words, if any, the LORD or the psalmist uttered to each other when the psalmist gazed at last into the loving face of his Great Shepherd, Jeshua.

Contextually, if we look at this octave as following immediately after שׁ (schin – tooth / defense) then it appears that for the psalmist, the battle is nearing its conclusion; a conclusion which certainly involves victory but also the end of life; since the spiritual battle never ceases while we live. When we look at the octave in this way, we see there are prayers, promises, and personal testimonies that are appropriate to the end of life.

Prayers at the end of life:

| | |
|---|--------|
| Let my cry come near before thee, O LORD. | (169a) |
| Give me understanding according to thy word. | (169b) |
| Let my supplication come before thee. | (170a) |
| Deliver me according to thy word. | (170b) |
| Let thine hand help me. | (173a) |
| Let my soul live and it shall praise thee; | (175a) |
| Let thy judgments help me. | (175b) |
| I have gone astray like a lost sheep; seek thy servant; | (176a) |

There are many signs of aging and the approach of the end of our earthly sojourn. But the inability to pray and lack of assurance that God hears even our most frail prayers should not be one of them. Many years of experience coupled with the knowledge that in many situations (both our own and others) that there is little that we can do except to pray, should be a constant motivation. In his prayers, He is pleading for deliverance from himself, from his lack of understanding (169b), from his ignorance of God's statutes (171b), from his inability to think and act as God would have him think and act (173¹³⁴¹), from his interior deadness (175), and from his waywardness (176). What the psalmist values most and has been stressing constantly throughout this psalm is the preciousness of his relationship with God and his inability to effectively maintain that relationship by himself. He needs God's help. He loves God's Law (113, 163), His testimonies (119, 167), His commandments (127), and His precepts (159), but he is unable to maintain them. "O that my ways were directed to keep thy statutes!" (5) ... "I have gone astray like a lost sheep; seek thy servant" (176). The psalmist knows that if

¹³⁴¹ The plea may be more easily understood if the first and last verses are exchanged and the implied personal weakness included: 'I have chosen thy precepts (but I am unable to implement them in my life). Let thine hand help me.' This is exactly how Paul describes himself in Romans 7:15 "For that which I do I allow not: for what I would, that do I not; but what I hate, that do I." Both Paul and the psalmist know what they desire to think and do but neither finds the ability within them because of the indwelling sin that leads them astray. Hence the psalmist ends this entire psalm with all its protests of love for God and His word with the heart wrenching plea: "I have gone astray like a lost sheep."

God does not help, the relationship, so greatly prized, will be lost. "Salvation is of the LORD"¹³⁴²

But there is a positive element in these prayers as well. It is wonderful to realize that these prayers of the psalmist also reflect a willingness to learn (169b, 171b). Hopefully every believer should be engaged in growing in grace and the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.¹³⁴³ Prayer encourages us to articulate our true dependence on God, for a favorable hearing (169a, 170a), for deliverance and help (170b, 173a, 175b), and for life and security (175a, 176a).

Hope at the end of Life:

My lips shall utter praise, when thou hast taught me thy statutes (171)

My tongue shall speak of thy word (172a)

Let my soul live and it shall praise thee. (175a)

When we are young, there are many hopes. Many (if not most) are focused on the years ahead. But when the remaining years of our earthly sojourn become few, the spectrum of our hopes becomes much less, until there are only those focused on eternity. And those hopes are simple and highly focused: that my soul may live and that it shall praise thee, and speak of thy word.

Testimonies at the end of Life:

All thy commandments are righteousness. (172b)

I have chosen thy precepts. (173b)

I have longed for thy salvation, O LORD (174a)

Thy law is my delight. (174b)

I do not forget thy commandments (176b)

One of the other signs of the end of our earthly sojourn is the tendency to look back over our lives to try and make sense of them, to find what, if anything of our lives has value. The psalmist tells us what it is that he most values in his long life. He has found that "All thy commandments are righteousness." (172b) He tells us that "I have chosen thy precepts (173b) not forgotten thy commandments" (176b) He tells us that "Thy law is my delight." (174b) But most importantly of all he tells us that, "I have longed for thy salvation O LORD." (174a) I have longed for thy **ישועה** - Yesh-oo'-aw, Jesus. Imagine the

¹³⁴² This quote comes from Jonah's prayer. It is perhaps his greatest discovery. It is included here because the psalmist's struggle is not unlike that of Jonah, whose disobedience to God's command to go to Nineveh resulted in his being swallowed whole by a great fish. Of all the strange places to pray to God this is certainly the strangest. And yet Jonah's prayer is profoundly accurate of many who turned to God in their difficult situations. "Then Jonah prayed unto the LORD his God out of the fish's belly ... 'When my soul fainted within me I remembered the LORD: and my prayer came in unto thee, into thine holy temple. They that observe lying vanities forsake their own mercy. But I will sacrifice unto thee with the voice of thanksgiving; I will pay that that I have vowed. Salvation is of the LORD.' And the LORD spoke unto the fish, and it vomited out Jonah upon the dry land." Jonah 2:1, 7-10

¹³⁴³ 2 Peter 3:18 But grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To him be glory both now and for ever. Amen.

psalmist's wonder and delight when, after finally crying out "I have gone astray like a lost sheep; seek thy servant" that he was granted his request only to find that it was not an abstract action on God's part that rescued him, but the Great Shepherd of the sheep, a Person of such holiness and beauty, that he could not begin to utter all His praise. That wonder and delight will be to all who have trusted in the Savior, Jesus. Truly they too can say with the psalmist, "I have longed for thy יְשׁוּעָה - Yesh-oo'-aw, Jesus, O LORD." Taken together they present a sense of a continuing willingness to learn, a desire to praise God in the future, and a great desire for salvation.

The Messenger of the Heart

¹⁶⁹ Let my cry come near before thee, O LORD:
Give me understanding according to thy word.



In the days of the psalmist when the usual form of governance was monarchical (often absolute) and communication slow at best, messengers were often sent to great and powerful kings who, after being informed of the messenger's presence would make a decision whether or not to grant the messenger an audience. To go unannounced or uninvited into the presence of a great king could mean death.¹³⁴⁴ The approach to the holy place of the tabernacle had as similar air about it. It too was off limits even to the priests, unless their presence there was according to the plan of service that God had given to Moses for the Day of Atonement.¹³⁴⁵ The sense of awe associated with such absolute power of life or death seems foreign to us today. The profound sense of awe at the presence of the Almighty is not foremost in many hearts today. This spiritual malady infected even ancient post-exilic Israel. "A son honors his father, and a servant his master. If then I be a father, where is mine honor? And if I be a master, where is my fear? saith the LORD of hosts unto you, O priests, that despise my name. ... I have no pleasure in you, saith the LORD of hosts, neither will I accept an offering at your hand."¹³⁴⁶ This was not the case with the psalmist in this verse where he petitions, "Let my cry come near before thee, O LORD." Will the Most High admit this messenger of the psalmist's heart into His almighty presence?

¹³⁴⁴ Ester 4:11 "All the king's servants, and the people of the king's provinces, do know, that whosoever, whether man or woman, shall come unto the king into the inner court, who is not called, there is one law of his to put him to death, except such to whom the king shall hold out the golden scepter, that he may live:"

¹³⁴⁵ Leviticus 16:2, 13, 34 And the LORD said unto Moses, Speak unto Aaron thy brother, that he come not at all times into the holy place within the vail before the mercy seat, which is upon the ark; that he die not: for I will appear in the cloud upon the mercy seat.... And he shall put the incense upon the fire before the LORD, that the cloud of the incense may cover the mercy seat that is upon the testimony, that he die not ... And this shall be an everlasting statute unto you, to make an atonement for the children of Israel for all their sins once a year."

¹³⁴⁶ Malachi 1:6, 10b

It was also, not uncommon in granting such an audience to take the opportunity to show the largess and greatness of the king by offering great favors even to “the half of the kingdom.”¹³⁴⁷ We have the echo of this gratuitous kindness in the parable of the impoverished debtor.¹³⁴⁸ So the little vignette that unfolds before us is filled with a tension that is somewhat foreign to us. There is the awesome and forbidding greatness of the King. There is also the desperation of the petitioner. And there is the real possibility of a great and magnanimous response. All these tensions resolve in the request. What great thing will the desperate petitioner ask of the fearsome and magnanimous King of Kings? The first line of the couplet creates that tension that the second line resolves. Having (presumably been granted a favorable hearing) will he ask for half the kingdom? No, he asks for something much more precious to him – “understanding according to thy word.” How then can this be so precious? Heretofore the psalmist has told us that the word of God is more precious than gold and brings greater joy than new found treasure. The value, again, lies in the role that the understanding of God plays in the relationship that the psalmist longs to have with God and indirectly attests to the value that he places on that relationship. Knowing God as a beloved friend and master is more precious to him than wealth, or property, or power. Perhaps the reader will doubt the dynamics of the view presented, but a brief review of God’s dealing with Solomon should serve to illustrate.

“In Gibeon the LORD appeared to Solomon in a dream by night: and God said, ‘Ask what I shall give thee.’ And Solomon said, ‘Thou hast showed unto thy servant David my father great mercy, according as he walked before thee in truth, and in righteousness, and in uprightness of heart with thee; and thou hast kept for him this great kindness, that thou hast given him a son to sit on his throne, as it is this day. And now, O LORD my God, thou hast made thy servant king instead of David my father: and I am but a little child: I know not how to go out or come in. And thy servant is in the midst of thy people which thou hast chosen, a great people, that cannot be numbered nor counted for multitude. Give therefore thy servant an understanding heart to judge thy people, that I may discern between good and bad: for who is able to judge this thy so great a people?’ And the speech pleased the Lord, that Solomon had asked this thing. And God said unto him, ‘Because thou hast asked this thing, and hast not asked for thyself long life; neither hast asked riches for thyself, nor hast asked the

¹³⁴⁷ Ester 5:1- 3 “Now it came to pass on the third day, that Esther put on her royal apparel, and stood in the inner court of the king’s house, over against the king’s house (*i.e. having gone into his presence uninvited and therefore at risk of her life*): and the king sat upon his royal throne in the royal house, over against the gate of the house. And it was so, when the king saw Esther the queen standing in the court, that she obtained favor in his sight: and the king held out to Esther the golden scepter that was in his hand. (*i.e. he spared her life.*) So Esther drew near, and touched the top of the scepter. Then said the king unto her, ‘What wilt thou, queen Esther? And what is thy request? It shall be even given thee to the half of the kingdom.’”

¹³⁴⁸ Matthew 18:23 – 27 Therefore is the kingdom of heaven likened unto a certain king, which would take account of his servants. And when he had begun to reckon, one was brought unto him, which owed him ten thousand talents. But forasmuch as he had not to pay, his lord commanded him to be sold, and his wife, and children, and all that he had, and payment to be made. The servant therefore fell down, and worshipped him, saying, Lord, have patience with me, and I will pay thee all. Then the lord of that servant was moved with compassion, and loosed him, and forgave him the debt.

life of thine enemies; but hast asked for thyself understanding to discern judgment; behold, I have done according to thy words: lo, I have given thee a wise and an understanding heart; so that there was none like thee before thee, neither after thee shall any arise like unto thee. And I have also given thee that which thou hast not asked, both riches, and honor: so that there shall not be any among the kings like unto thee all thy days. And if thou wilt walk in my ways, to keep my statutes and my commandments, as thy father David did walk, then I will lengthen thy days.’”¹³⁴⁹

Brokenness and Contrition - Messengers of the Heart:

- ¹⁶⁹ Let my cry come near before thee, O LORD:
Give me understanding according to thy word.
- ¹⁷⁰ Let my supplication come before thee:
Deliver me according to thy word.



Verses 169 and 170 are a matched set of petitions. They both begin with the plea “let my... come before thee” and end with the hope “according to thy word.” As we saw in the last lesson, there is a tone in the two-fold petition: “let my...” that echoes the awe in which the psalmist pleads with God. His sense of awe of God is associated with the absolute power over life or death that God holds as the Creator of all life. We also noted, that this profound sense of awe at the presence of the Almighty is not foremost in many hearts today. But there is more that is often missing. To find out what, we must look at the “messengers” the psalmist sends to God bearing his real plea “Give me understanding ... Deliver me.”

Tau marks the last letter of the Hebrew alphabet and signifies the end of things. At the end of all their lives, people will be confronted with God. He is the end of all things,¹³⁵⁰ which is why His fear is the beginning of wisdom.¹³⁵¹ So the psalmist knows that when all is said and done, he must look to God for all that he ultimately desires, and all that he truly desires is ultimately found in God. This realization of total need, together with his awe of the Almighty, creates the tension discussed in the last lesson. The psalmist does not demand “hear me” or “hear my cry.” The desperateness of his need humbles his soul before God. He says “let my cry (and) my supplication come before thee.” The word “cry” echoes the desperateness of the need and the word “supplication” echoes the humility that need fosters in the suppliant. That humiliation, which is at its core a recognition of the truth of our creaturely dependence upon God, is a good place to begin with the God who doesn’t need us for anything, but, for reasons beyond our ken, loves us with a love past understanding. “The LORD is nigh unto them that are of a

¹³⁴⁹ 1Kings 3:5 - 14

¹³⁵⁰ Revelation 22:13 I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end, the first and the last.

¹³⁵¹ Proverbs 9:10 The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom: and the knowledge of the holy is understanding.

broken heart; and saveth such as be of a contrite spirit.”¹³⁵² The messengers of the psalmist’s heart are humility and contrition. These ‘messengers’ are too often lacking in many modern prayers addressed to the Most High God. People seem intent to bargain, to claim promises, make demands on God’s love, and a host of other presumptions borne of an ignorance of just Who they are addressing and how awesome He really is! If God were ever to play back our prayer life to us, as He hears it from within the Royal throne room, how ashamed would we be of our cavalier approach and how frightened of His anger. If we reflect back to the earthly potentate who held absolute power over life and death, what would we think of a person who asked that his messenger be admitted when that ambassador of his desperate need was clothed in rags and was ill-educated in the fine art of wise and diplomatic communication. Even if such a person were admitted, would not their presence mark the disrespect of the petitioner and their presence be utter folly? And if it were so with a mere human ruler, how much more would it be true of the Ruler of the Universe? How grateful, therefore, must we be that among all our fathomless guilt which our Lord bore on the cross, there are also the sins of the spirit that we presumed were our prayers?¹³⁵³

But there is another element of the tension that we mentioned in the last lesson. The possibility of an overwhelming response, not unlike God’s answer to Solomon when he asked for an understanding heart and was given, in addition, “both riches, and honor” and, if obedient, length of days. It is not that taking great risks can bring great rewards, as is the case in the world. Rather it is in great reverence and true repentance that the possibility of the great reward of mercy lies. As we look at the psalmist we have a real model for effectual prayer. His approach to God is based on a correct understanding of his relationship with the LORD: Awe at His presence, humility because of his desperate need of Him, and deep contrition for his many offenses against the majesty of His holiness.

Over and over, God tells us that He is a merciful God ¹³⁵⁴, encouraging us to come to a very accurate ‘right mind.’¹³⁵⁵ It is therefore a foregone conclusion based on all that we

¹³⁵² Psalm 34:18

¹³⁵³ Psalm 109:7 “When he shall be judged, let him be condemned: and let his prayer become sin.” Can prayer be sin? James clearly tells us so. Speaking to believers, he says, “Ye lust, and have not: ye kill, and desire to have, and cannot obtain: ye fight and war, yet ye have not, because ye ask not. Ye ask, and receive not, because ye ask amiss, that ye may consume it upon your lusts.” (James 4:2 – 3)

¹³⁵⁴ Exodus 33:18 - 20 “And he (*Moses*) said, I beseech thee, shew me thy glory. And he (*God*) said, I will make all my goodness pass before thee, and I will proclaim the name of the LORD before thee; and will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and will shew mercy on whom I will shew mercy.0 And he said, Thou canst not see my face: for there shall no man see me, and live.

¹³⁵⁵ We see this in the turning point of the famous parable of the prodigal son. “And when he came to himself (*i.e. the prodigal son began to think correctly about himself and the miserable situation of his own making*), he said, ‘How many hired servants of my father’s have bread enough and to spare, and I perish with hunger! I will arise and go to my father, and will say unto him, Father, I have sinned against heaven, and before thee, and am no more worthy to be called thy son: make me as one of thy hired servants.’” He realized at last his sinful folly (contrition) and his desperate need of his father, a humbling realization, indeed.

find in scripture that the psalmist's plea will be heard most favorably which should be a comfort to any soul similarly cast upon God in awe, humility, and contrition.¹³⁵⁶

Being this assured of a favorable audience in the divine throne room and a favorable disposition to hear and answer the psalmist's petitions, let us look at what the psalmist actually desires of God.

The psalmist asks "Give me understanding" and "Deliver me" both "according to thy word." The requests are not two separate requests but two parts of the same petition. To be given understanding is to be given light which delivers from darkness. The entire petition rests upon the word of God. This last may be understood in at least three ways. Either the word of God refers to some promise already given whose future redemption the psalmist places his hope in. Or it may refer to the means by which understanding is granted. The word being illuminated is the very understanding sought. In that case this is a prayer for enlightenment arising out of the divinely imparted understanding of what God has said in all His word - commandments, statutes, precepts, testimonies, etc. But the context also supports the notion that the psalmist is seeking a fresh word from the LORD that will in effect command his understanding and deliverance by royal *fiat*. In fact, these three notions are not separate, but three ways of looking at the way that God communicates. His communication gives hope in the form of promises, light in the form of commandments, statutes, precepts, testimonies; and power in the form of the divine *fiat*. And that is ultimately what the psalmist really wants. He doesn't want understanding / deliverance as a separate immaterial entity or an end in itself. He simply wants God to speak to him in tones of love and mercy. Why is this? Because he loves God and wants to be with Him to behold the beauty of the LORD. "One thing have I desired of the LORD, that will I seek after; that I may dwell in the house of the LORD all the days of my life, to behold the beauty {or "the delight"} of the LORD, and to enquire in his temple."¹³⁵⁷ And that is what God wants as well. "Father, I will that they also, whom thou hast given me, be with me where I am; that they may behold my glory, which thou hast given me: for thou lovedst me before the foundation of the world."¹³⁵⁸

¹³⁵⁶ Witness the response of the father of the prodigal who just wanted a job. "But the father said to his servants, 'Bring forth the best robe, and put it on him; and put a ring on his hand, and shoes on his feet: And bring hither the fatted calf, and kill it; and let us eat, and be merry: For this my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found.' And they began to be merry." (Luke 15:22 – 24)

¹³⁵⁷ Psalm 27:4

¹³⁵⁸ John 17:24

“The Gift of Utterance”

171 My lips shall utter praise,
When thou hast taught me thy statutes
172 My tongue shall speak of thy word:
For all thy commandments are righteousness.



In this couplet, we have two declarations about the psalmist’s speech, his lips shall utter praise and his tongue shall speak of God’s word. Both declarations are in the future but only the first gives us any hint as to when these things shall be. He will speak thus “when thou hast taught me thy statutes.”

In the previous lesson, we sensed that the psalmist was assured of a favorable audience in the divine throne room and a favorable disposition to hear and answer his petitions, “Give me understanding” and “Deliver me” both “according to thy word.” This assurance arises based on what God, Himself, tells us of His merciful character and willingness to respond to a heart that is broken and contrite. As we also noted, the requests are not two separate requests but two parts of the same petition. To be given understanding is to be given light which delivers from darkness. The entire petition rests upon the word of God. But the answer to the prayer involves the divine intervention to “teach me thy statutes.” In these verses, the psalmist is telling us that when God has answered his prayer and taught him as he has desired, then the psalmist’s manner of speech will be changed. In other words, his future speech patterns are dependent on the work of God in teaching him. Clearly, these verses are founded on the confidence that God will have heard the psalmist’s previous petitions with favor and will answer them.

In so saying the psalmist is also telling God that he is willing to learn about what God has said, even at the τ (tau) or end of his life. Given that God is transcendent, learning about His word should be a lifelong pursuit for all His children. Furthermore, the tongue, which James tells us is an unruly member of our physical nature, can really only be tamed by God.¹³⁵⁹ Here again the ability to speak thus of God may be seen as a gift, not unlike what happened to the early church on Pentecost. “And they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance.”¹³⁶⁰

¹³⁵⁹ James 3:4 – 10 “Behold also the ships, which though they be so great, and are driven of fierce winds, yet are they turned about with a very small helm, whithersoever the governor listeth. Even so the tongue is a little member, and boasteth great things. Behold, how great a matter a little fire kindleth! And the tongue is a fire, a world of iniquity: so is the tongue among our members, that it defileth the whole body, and setteth on fire the course of nature; and it is set on fire of hell. For every kind of beasts, and of birds, and of serpents, and of things in the sea, is tamed, and hath been tamed of mankind. **But the tongue can no man tame. It is an unruly evil, full of deadly poison.** Therewith bless we God, even the Father; and therewith curse we men, which are made after the similitude of God. Out of the same mouth proceedeth blessing and cursing. My brethren, these things ought not so to be.

¹³⁶⁰ Acts 2:4 Theologians may debate exactly what is meant by “speaking with other tongues” (i.e. xeno-glossolalia or simply glossolalia) but what is clear is that the Holy Spirit manifested a remarkable control of the human tongue and that such “utterance” should be seen as a gift as Paul makes clear to the Corinthian believers. “Paul, called to be an apostle of Jesus Christ through the will of God, and Sosthenes our brother, unto the church of God which is at Corinth, to them that are sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints, with all that in every place call upon the name of Jesus Christ our Lord, both theirs and ours: grace be unto you, and peace, from God our Father, and from the Lord Jesus Christ. I thank my God always on your behalf, **for the grace of God which is given**

The psalmist's statements reveal not only a willingness to learn (i.e. "When thou hast taught me") but a willingness to submit his ability to speak to the Spirit's control ("My lips shall" ... "My tongue shall"). So, the entrance of God's word is manifest not only newfound knowledge (enlightenment) but in a new control of the psalmist's tongue (transformation): "in all utterance, and in all knowledge", as the Apostle Paul tells the Corinthians. Although the psalmist knows that he is incapable of effectively doing what he promises that he will do, nevertheless in yielding his mind and his will to God, he is opening the door for God to do what the psalmist cannot. God does not manipulate, but God does answer prayer.

One can also discern in this set of couplets the results of God's teaching. The psalmist's words will be in praise of his teacher and (we must infer) they will be enlightening to his hearers. But this is the end of life. Who then shall be the ones who hear him "speak of thy word?" Most likely a younger generation (including ourselves) that, like the psalmist, seek fellowship with God. But what of eternity? I believe we do no harm to these verses if we reflect on the possibility that the psalmist's hearers will be the angelic hosts of whom the scriptures tell us. We know that things pertaining to God are of great interest to them and that they desire to look into them.¹³⁶¹ If this is so, the verses further argue that the duration of the psalmist's praise will be for eternity, because the transforming power of the word of God produces an irreversible transformation of the person that will be eternal. Given this situation, we may ask ourselves, what better prayer could anyone ask at their personal \aleph , at the end of their life?

But the last line of this set of couplets also deserves consideration. In it, the psalmist tells God exactly why he desires what he does, "For all thy commandments are righteousness." At first glance this may seem unrelated but actually it lies at the root of the whole matter. For anyone to be taught, or to teach, the relationship between the student and the teacher must be right. Fellowship with the God Who is impeccably holy requires that the relationship be righteous. And it is in the righteousness of the commandments that the key to a successful teacher / student relationship lies. Righteousness implies teachability!

Salvation Workout

¹⁷³ Let thine hand help me;

For I have chosen thy precepts.

¹⁷⁴ I have longed for thy salvation, O LORD;

And thy law is my delight.



you by Jesus Christ; that in everything ye are enriched by him, **in all utterance, and in all knowledge**; even as the testimony of Christ was confirmed in you: (1 Corinthians 1:1 – 6)

¹³⁶¹ 1Peter 1:12 Unto whom it was revealed, that not unto themselves, but unto us they did minister the things, which are now reported unto you by **them that have preached the gospel unto you with the Holy Ghost sent down from heaven; which things the angels desire to look into.**

This set of verses highlights the idea that the psalmist's petitions are not one-sided, as if he were wanting God to do everything for him because he can do nothing for himself. He knows that he needs God's help for his spiritual life so he asks "Let thine hand help me." But he follows his request with three statements about his spiritual life that support his prayer "I have chosen thy precepts; I have longed for thy salvation; and thy law is my delight." These are necessary but the psalmist knows all too well that they are not sufficient. What they tell us, however, is that dependency is not helplessness and that relationship with God leaves room for individual steps of faith in response to God's initiatives. It is God who tells us how best to think when he gives us His precepts, but we must choose to think that way. We may not always succeed, but we must at least give assent, by faith, that His way of thinking is right. It is God (Jeshua - Jesus) who freely offers us salvation as a gift,¹³⁶² but it is we who must long for it and believe in Him as we accept the salvation that He provides.¹³⁶³ God gives us the law as a model for relationship with Himself, but it is we who must delight ourselves in it.

Some might take exception to this last assertion. Many prefer to say that it is in keeping the law, not just delighting in it, that a person obtains a relationship with God. Scripture clearly points out the fallacy of this approach. "Knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law, but by the faith of Jesus Christ, even we have believed in Jesus Christ, that we might be justified by the faith of Christ, and not by the works of the law: for **by the works of the law shall no flesh be justified.**"¹³⁶⁴ How then is delight different than obedience? The Apostle Paul says exactly what the psalmist is saying here. "... I delight in the law of God after the inward man." But he, like the psalmist, knows that he does not keep the law. Paul and the psalmist have both "gone astray like a lost sheep."¹³⁶⁵ Why is this? Paul explains what the psalmist is silent on, but nevertheless knows. "I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members."¹³⁶⁶ So, whereas the psalmist cries out "Let thine hand help me," Paul cries out "O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death?" and answers just as quickly "I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord."¹³⁶⁷

What is Paul saying? He says, "I delight in the law of God after the inward man: ... with the mind I myself serve the law of God...". The problem for the psalmist, for Paul, and for us is SIN, a fundamental corruption of our humanity. We serve the law with our mind by our delight in it, but without God's help we will everlastingly serve sin with

¹³⁶² Romans 6:23 "For the wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord."

¹³⁶³ John 1:11 – 12 "He came unto his own, and his own received him not. But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name."

¹³⁶⁴ Galatians 2:16

¹³⁶⁵ Psalm 119:176a "I have gone astray like a lost sheep..."

¹³⁶⁶ Romans 7:23

¹³⁶⁷ Romans 7:24 -25

our human bodies. The former (delight) is necessary but not sufficient. To overcome the latter (serving Sin in the flesh) we need, "thine hand (to) help me." This is not just forgiveness for sins past (mercy) but deliverance from our corrupted sin nature (i.e. it is the grace of God which saves).

If we return, for a moment, to the assertion made above, "that relationship with God leaves room for individual steps of faith in response to God's initiatives," then we can see that delighting in the law of God is just such a step of faith. Delight in the Law of God is the testimony of the "inward man" to his belief that the law of God is "holy, and just, and good"¹³⁶⁸ and that it is "spiritual"¹³⁶⁹ or spiritually right. And it is just such faith that God honors. "For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast."¹³⁷⁰

But is that all? Is it just that God does, and we respond in faith so that He finishes the work of salvation in an instant? The 176 verses of this psalm with its numerous struggles, pleadings, sufferings, and testimonies of devotion clearly point to salvation as a process as well as an event. Abraham hears the call of God in Haran at seventy-five years of age¹³⁷¹ and leaves, becoming a stranger and a pilgrim,¹³⁷² (an event) but he wanders as pilgrim and stranger for the next hundred years¹³⁷³ (a process). The children of Israel are given the promised land as a gift, but they will struggle for years to possess it. So too our salvation. The apostle Paul this urges the Philippians (and us) to "work out your own salvation with fear and trembling. For it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure."¹³⁷⁴

The Shepherd's Unspeakable Gift

¹⁷⁵ Let my soul live, and it shall praise thee;
And let thy judgments help me.

¹⁷⁶ I have gone astray like a lost sheep;
Seek thy servant;

For I do not forget thy commandments



¹³⁶⁸ Romans 7:12 Wherefore the law is holy, and the commandment holy, and just, and good.

¹³⁶⁹ Romans 7:14 For we know that the law is spiritual:

¹³⁷⁰ Ephesians 2:8 - 9

¹³⁷¹ Genesis 12:4 "So Abram departed, as the LORD had spoken unto him; and Lot went with him: and Abram was seventy and five years old when he departed out of Haran."

¹³⁷² Hebrews 11:13 - 19

¹³⁷³ Genesis 25:7 And these are the days of the years of Abraham's life which he lived, an hundred threescore and fifteen years.

¹³⁷⁴ Philippians 2:12 - 13 "Wherefore, my beloved, as ye have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling. For it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure."

This set of verses concludes not only the octave but the entire psalm with the only tricolon in the entire psalm.¹³⁷⁵ It also introduces a figure (the lost sheep) that has not occurred before. The lines form a tension with the opening line. “Blessed are the undefiled in the way, who walk in the law of the LORD... (*but*) I have gone astray like a lost sheep.” The blessed never seem to miss the way. The psalmist never seems to be able to stay on it!

Although this psalm repeatedly emphasizes the communications of the LORD, it is all about following in the Way of the LORD. The law of the LORD describes the Way of the LORD. The Way of the LORD is the way of His commandments, His statutes, His precepts, and His testimonies. It is the way of truth.¹³⁷⁶ The psalm is also all about relationship to God. The prophet Amos asks the rhetorical question that the psalmist lives by. “Can two walk together, except they be agreed?”¹³⁷⁷ The psalmist knows that to have fellowship with God, he must walk in the way of the LORD as presented in His word, in all its forms. But for that to happen he must be taught of God. And so, he pleads to be instructed. A good student remembers what he has been taught. In these closing verses, the psalmist tells God as much. “I do not forget thy commandments.” But knowing is not enough. The whole person must be involved in this walk. The word must be hidden in the heart which treasures it more than gold. The word must be spoken with the mouth which praises God. The feet must walk in the way, while the hands are raised in prayer. A good student remembers what he has been taught, but a good disciple is one that follows his Master not losing sight of where He leads. The psalmist knows that in order to walk in this way and not fall, he needs God’s hand to hold him up. He needs the light of the word to illumine the path in the darkness of troubles caused by the wicked who are far from salvation, who speak against him, and who persecute him without just cause. He needs the help of God’s hand and His judgments. In short, he needs the grace of God to guide his walk. He has done what he could, but much is beyond his control. So, the psalmist paints another picture of creature of the way – a sheep. He draws on an image that goes back to the shepherd patriarchs; even to Moses the great law-giver who “kept the flock of Jethro his father in law, the priest of Midian.” He needs an Aleph to lead him the way Moses “led the flock to the backside of the desert, and came to the mountain of God, even to Horeb.”¹³⁷⁸ He

¹³⁷⁵ Goldingay *Psalms* Vol. 3 Page 443

¹³⁷⁶ Ps 119:14 I have rejoiced in the way of thy testimonies, as much as in all riches.

Ps 119:27 Make me to understand the way of thy precepts; so shall I talk of thy wondrous works.

Ps 119:30 ¶ I have chosen the way of truth; thy judgments have I laid before me.

Ps 119:32 I will run the way of thy commandments, when thou shalt enlarge my heart.

Ps 119:33 ¶ HE. Teach me, O LORD, the way of thy statutes; and I shall keep it unto the end.

¹³⁷⁷ Amos 3:3

¹³⁷⁸ Exodus 3:1 “Now Moses kept the flock of Jethro his father in law, the priest of Midian: and he led the flock to the backside of the desert, and came to the mountain of God, even to Horeb.”

needs a shepherd because he knows that he has “gone astray like a lost¹³⁷⁹ sheep.” He has lost his way and will perish unless the LORD seeks his servant. In confessing his frailty and utter dependence, the psalmist tells us of our universal plight. “All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned everyone to his own way...”¹³⁸⁰ We are all perishing. Unless the Great Shepherd seeks and finds each lost sheep,¹³⁸¹ will it not “live” and “praise thee.”

What does not appear in the psalmist’s plea is the price that the Shepherd will pay in suffering to rescue the wandering sheep dying in the desert of sin. Yes, “all we like sheep have gone astray (*and*) we have turned everyone to his own way, (*but*) the LORD hath laid on him the iniquity of us all.”¹³⁸² The gift of the grace of God by which we, together with the psalmist live unto God, is freely given but was not free to the giver. Jesus’ sacrifice of Himself on the cross for our sake is both the necessary and the sufficient cause of salvation for the psalmist and for us. The Giver and His unspeakable gift,¹³⁸³ having been received by faith, will be the endless theme of our wonder, worship, and praise for all eternity!

¹³⁷⁹ The word translated “lost” is אָבַד (pronounced aw-bad’) a primitive root meaning, properly, to wander away, to lose oneself but by implication to perish.

¹³⁸⁰ Isaiah 53:6a “All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned everyone to his own way...”

¹³⁸¹ Luke 19:10 “For the Son of man is come to seek and to save that which was lost.”

¹³⁸² Isaiah 53:1 - 9

“Who hath believed our report? and to whom is the arm of the LORD revealed? For he shall grow up before him as a tender plant, and as a root out of a dry ground: he hath no form nor comeliness; and when we shall see him, there is no beauty that we should desire him. He is despised and rejected of men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief: and we hid as it were our faces from him; he was despised, and we esteemed him not.

Surely he hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows: yet we did esteem him stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted. But he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon him; and with his stripes we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned everyone to his own way; and the LORD hath laid on him the iniquity of us all. He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth: he is brought as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is dumb, so he openeth not his mouth. He was taken from prison and from judgment: and who shall declare his generation? for he was cut off out of the land of the living: for the transgression of my people was he stricken. And he made his grave with the wicked, and with the rich in his death; because he had done no violence, neither was any deceit in his mouth.”

¹³⁸³ 2 Corinthians 9:15 “Thanks be unto God for his unspeakable gift.”

Usage

1. Word – אמרה 'imrah, דבר dabar.

1. Ps 119:9 Wherewithal shall a young man cleanse his way?
By taking heed thereto according to thy **word**. (דבר dabar)
2. Ps 119:11 Thy **word** (אמרה 'imrah) have I hid in mine heart, that I might not sin against thee.
3. Ps 119:16 I will delight myself in thy statutes: I will not forget thy **word**. (דבר dabar)
4. Ps 119:17 Deal bountifully with thy servant, that I may live, and keep thy **word**. (דבר dabar)
5. Ps 119:25 My soul cleaveth unto the dust: quicken thou me according to thy **word**. (דבר dabar)
6. Ps 119:28 My soul melteth for heaviness: strengthen thou me according unto thy **word**. (דבר dabar)
7. Ps 119:38 Stablish thy **word** (אמרה 'imrah) unto thy servant, who is devoted to thy fear.
8. Ps 119:41 Let thy mercies come also unto me, O LORD, even thy salvation, according to thy **word**. (אמרה 'imrah)
9. Ps 119:42 So shall I have wherewith to answer him that reproacheth me: for I trust in thy **word**. (דבר dabar)
10. Ps 119:43 And take not the **word** (דבר dabar) of truth utterly out of my mouth; for I have hoped in thy judgments.
11. Ps 119:49 Remember the **word** (דבר dabar) unto thy servant, upon which thou hast caused me to hope.
12. Ps 119:50 This is my comfort in my affliction: for thy **word** (אמרה 'imrah) hath quickened me.
13. Ps 119:57 Thou art my portion, O LORD: I have said that I would keep thy **words**. (דבר dabar)
14. Ps 119:58 I entreated thy favor with my whole heart: be merciful unto me according to thy **word**. (אמרה 'imrah)
15. Ps 119:65 Thou hast dealt well with thy servant, O LORD, according unto thy **word**. (דבר dabar)
16. Ps 119:67 Before I was afflicted I went astray: but now have I kept thy **word**. (אמרה 'imrah)
17. Ps 119:74 They that fear thee will be glad when they see me; because I have hoped in thy **word**. (דבר dabar)
18. Ps 119:76 Let, I pray thee, thy merciful kindness be for my comfort,
According to thy **word** (אמרה 'imrah) unto thy servant.
19. Ps 119:81 My soul fainteth for thy salvation: but I hope in thy **word**. (דבר dabar)
20. Ps 119:82 Mine eyes fail for thy **word** (אמרה 'imrah), saying, When wilt thou comfort me?
21. Ps 119:89 For ever, O LORD, thy **word** (דבר dabar) is settled in heaven.
22. Ps 119:101 I have refrained my feet from every evil way, that I might keep thy **word**. (דבר dabar)
23. Ps 119:103 How sweet are thy **words** (אמרה 'imrah) unto my taste! yea, sweeter than honey to my mouth!
24. Ps 119:105 Thy **word** (דבר dabar) is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path.
25. Ps 119:107 I am afflicted very much: quicken me, O LORD, according unto thy **word**. (דבר dabar)
26. Ps 119:114 Thou art my hiding place and my shield: I hope in thy **word**. (דבר dabar)
27. Ps 119:116 Uphold me according unto thy **word** (אמרה 'imrah), that I may live:
And let me not be ashamed of my hope.
28. Ps 119:123 Mine eyes fail for thy salvation, and for the **word** (אמרה 'imrah) of thy righteousness.
29. Ps 119:130 The entrance of thy **words** (דבר dabar) giveth light; it giveth understanding unto the simple.
30. Ps 119:133 Order my steps in thy **word** (אמרה 'imrah): and let not any iniquity have dominion over me.
31. Ps 119:139 My zeal hath consumed me, because mine enemies have forgotten thy **words**. (דבר dabar)
32. Ps 119:140 Thy **word** (אמרה 'imrah) is very pure: therefore thy servant loveth it.
33. Ps 119:147 I prevented the dawning of the morning, and cried: I hoped in thy **word**. (דבר dabar)
34. Ps 119:148 Mine eyes prevent the night watches, that I might meditate in thy **word** (אמרה 'imrah).
35. Ps 119:154 Plead my cause, and deliver me: quicken me according to thy **word** (אמרה 'imrah).
36. Ps 119:158 I beheld the transgressors, and was grieved; because they kept not thy **word** (אמרה 'imrah).
37. Ps 119:160 Thy **word** (דבר dabar) is true from the beginning:
And every one of thy righteous judgments endureth for ever.
38. Ps 119:161 Princes have persecuted me without a cause: but my heart standeth in awe of thy **word**. (דבר dabar)
39. Ps 119:162 I rejoice at thy **word** (אמרה 'imrah), as one that findeth great spoil.
40. Ps 119:169 Let my cry come near before thee, O LORD: give me understanding according to thy **word**. (דבר dabar)
41. Ps 119:170 Let my supplication come before thee: deliver me according to thy **word** (אמרה 'imrah).
42. Ps 119:172 My tongue shall speak of thy **word** (אמרה 'imrah): for all thy commandments are righteousness.

2. Commandments - מצוה mitzvah

1. Ps 119:6 Then shall I not be ashamed, when I have respect unto all thy **commandments**.

2. Ps 119:10 With my whole heart have I sought thee: O let me not wander from thy **commandments**.
3. Ps 119:19 I am a stranger in the earth: hide not thy **commandments** from me.
4. Ps 119:21 Thou hast rebuked the proud that are cursed, which do err from thy **commandments**.
5. Ps 119:32 I will run the way of thy **commandments**, when thou shalt enlarge my heart.
6. Ps 119:35 Make me to go in the path of thy **commandments**; for therein do I delight.
7. Ps 119:47 And I will delight myself in thy **commandments**, which I have loved.
8. Ps 119:48 My hands also will I lift up unto thy **commandments**, which I have loved;
And I will meditate in thy statutes.
9. Ps 119:60 I made haste, and delayed not to keep thy **commandments**.
10. Ps 119:66 Teach me good judgment and knowledge: for I have believed thy **commandments**.
11. Ps 119:73 Thy hands have made me and fashioned me: give me understanding,
That I may learn thy commandments.
12. Ps 119:86 All thy **commandments** are faithful: they persecute me wrongfully; help thou me.
13. Ps 119:96 I have seen an end of all perfection: but thy **commandment** is exceeding broad.
14. Ps 119:98 Thou through thy **commandments** hast made me wiser than mine enemies:
For they are ever with me.
15. Ps 119:115 Depart from me, ye evildoers: for I will keep the **commandments** of my God.
16. Ps 119:127 Therefore I love thy **commandments** above gold; yea, above fine gold.
17. Ps 119:131 I opened my mouth, and panted: for I longed for thy **commandments**.
18. Ps 119:143 Trouble and anguish have taken hold on me: yet thy **commandments** are my delights.
19. Ps 119:151 Thou art near, O LORD; and all thy **commandments** are truth.
20. Ps 119:166 LORD, I have hoped for thy salvation, and done thy **commandments**.
21. Ps 119:172 My tongue shall speak of thy word: for all thy commandments are **righteousness**.
22. Ps 119:176 I have gone astray like a lost sheep; seek thy servant;
For I do not forget thy **commandments**.

3. Statutes - צוֹת choq

1. Ps 119:5 O that my ways were directed to keep thy **statutes**!
2. Ps 119:8 I will keep thy **statutes**: O forsake me not utterly.
3. Ps 119:12 Blessed art thou, O LORD: teach me thy **statutes**.
4. Ps 119:16 I will delight myself in thy **statutes**: I will not forget thy word.
5. Ps 119:23 Princes also did sit and speak against me: but thy servant did meditate in thy **statutes**.
6. Ps 119:26 I have declared my ways, and thou heardest me: teach me thy **statutes**.
7. Ps 119:33 Teach me, O LORD, the way of thy **statutes**; and I shall keep it unto the end.
8. Ps 119:48 My hands also will I lift up unto thy **commandments**, which I have loved;
And I will meditate in thy **statutes**.
9. Ps 119:54 Thy **statutes** have been my songs in the house of my pilgrimage.
10. Ps 119:64 The earth, O LORD, is full of thy mercy: teach me thy **statutes**.
11. Ps 119:68 Thou art good, and doest good; teach me thy **statutes**.
12. Ps 119:71 It is good for me that I have been afflicted; that I might learn thy **statutes**.
13. Ps 119:80 Let my heart be sound in thy **statutes**; that I be not ashamed.
14. Ps 119:83 For I am become like a bottle in the smoke; yet do I not forget thy **statutes**.
15. Ps 119:112 I have inclined mine heart to perform thy **statutes** always, even unto the end.
16. Ps 119:117 Hold thou me up, and I shall be safe: and I will have respect unto thy **statutes** continually.
17. Ps 119:118 Thou hast trodden down all them that err from thy **statutes**: for their deceit is falsehood.
18. Ps 119:124 Deal with thy servant according unto thy mercy, and teach me thy **statutes**.
19. Ps 119:135 Make thy face to shine upon thy servant; and teach me thy **statutes**.
20. Ps 119:145 I cried with my whole heart; hear me, O LORD: I will keep thy **statutes**.
21. Ps 119:155 Salvation is far from the wicked: for they seek not thy **statutes**.
22. Ps 119:171 My lips shall utter praise, when thou hast taught me thy **statutes**.

4. Precepts - פְּקֻדֹת piquwd

1. Ps 119:4 Thou hast commanded us to keep thy **precepts** diligently.
2. Ps 119:15 I will meditate in thy **precepts**, and have respect unto thy ways.
3. Ps 119:27 Make me to understand the way of thy **precepts**: so shall I talk of thy wondrous works.
4. Ps 119:40 Behold, I have longed after thy **precepts**: quicken me in thy righteousness.
5. Ps 119:45 And I will walk at liberty: for I seek thy **precepts**.

6. Ps 119:56 This I had, because I kept thy **precepts**.
7. Ps 119:63 I am a companion of all them that fear thee, and of them that keep thy **precepts**.
8. Ps 119:69 The proud have forged a lie against me: but I will keep thy **precepts** with my whole heart.
9. Ps 119:78 Let the proud be ashamed; for they dealt perversely with me without a cause:
But I will meditate in thy **precepts**.
10. Ps 119:87 They had almost consumed me upon earth; but I forsook not thy **precepts**.
11. Ps 119:93 I will never forget thy **precepts**: for with them thou hast quickened me.
12. Ps 119:94 I am thine, save me; for I have sought thy **precepts**.
13. Ps 119:100 I understand more than the ancients, because I keep thy **precepts**.
14. Ps 119:104 Through thy **precepts** I get understanding; therefore I hate every false way.
15. Ps 119:110 The wicked have laid a snare for me: yet I erred not from thy **precepts**.
16. Ps 119:128 Therefore I esteem all thy **precepts** concerning all things to be right;
And I hate every false way.
17. Ps 119:134 Deliver me from the oppression of man: so will I keep thy **precepts**.
18. Ps 119:141 I am small and despised: yet do not I forget thy **precepts**.
19. Ps 119:159 Consider how I love thy **precepts**: quicken me, O LORD, according to thy loving-kindness.
20. Ps 119:168 I have kept thy **precepts** and thy testimonies: for all my ways are before thee.
21. Ps 119:173 Let thine hand help me; for I have chosen thy **precepts**.

5. Testimonies - עֲדוּת, עֲדָה `edah, עֲדוּת `eduwth

1. Ps 119:2 Blessed are they that keep his **testimonies**, and that seek him with the whole heart.
2. Ps 119:14 I have rejoiced in the way of thy **testimonies**, as much as in all riches.
3. Ps 119:22 Remove from me reproach and contempt; for I have kept thy **testimonies**.
4. Ps 119:24 Thy **testimonies** also are my delight and my counsellors.
5. Ps 119:31 I have stuck unto thy **testimonies**: O LORD, put me not to shame.
6. Ps 119:36 Incline my heart unto thy **testimonies**, and not to covetousness.
7. Ps 119:46 I will speak of thy **testimonies** also before kings, and will not be ashamed.
8. Ps 119:59 I thought on my ways, and turned my feet unto thy **testimonies**.
9. Ps 119:79 Let those that fear thee turn unto me, and those that have known thy **testimonies**.
10. Ps 119:88 Quicken me after thy lovingkindness; so shall I keep the **testimony** of thy mouth.
11. Ps 119:95 The wicked have waited for me to destroy me: but I will consider thy **testimonies**.
12. Ps 119:99 I have more understanding than all my teachers: for thy **testimonies** are my meditation.
13. Ps 119:111 Thy **testimonies** have I taken as an heritage for ever: for they are the rejoicing of my heart.
14. Ps 119:119 Thou puttest away all the wicked of the earth like dross: therefore I love thy **testimonies**.
15. Ps 119:125 I am thy servant; give me understanding, that I may know thy **testimonies**.
16. Ps 119:129 Thy **testimonies** are wonderful: therefore doth my soul keep them.
17. Ps 119:138 Thy **testimonies** that thou hast commanded are righteous and very faithful.
18. Ps 119:144 The righteousness of thy **testimonies** is everlasting: give me understanding, and I shall live.
19. Ps 119:146 I cried unto thee; save me, and I shall keep thy **testimonies**.
20. Ps 119:152 Concerning thy **testimonies**, I have known of old that thou hast founded them for ever.
21. Ps 119:157 Many are my persecutors and mine enemies; yet do I not decline from thy **testimonies**.
22. Ps 119:167 My soul hath kept thy **testimonies**; and I love them exceedingly.
23. Ps 119:168 I have kept thy precepts and thy **testimonies**: for all my ways are before thee.

6. Judgments (or "ordinances" as in verse 91) - מִשְׁפָּט mishpat

1. Ps 119:7 I will praise thee with uprightness of heart,
When I shall have learned thy righteous **judgments**.
2. Ps 119:13 With my lips have I declared all the **judgments** of thy mouth.
3. Ps 119:20 My soul breaketh for the longing that it hath unto thy **judgments** at all times.
4. Ps 119:30 I have chosen the way of truth: thy **judgments** have I laid before me.
5. Ps 119:39 Turn away my reproach which I fear: for thy **judgments** are good.
6. Ps 119:43 And take not the word of truth utterly out of my mouth; for I have hoped in thy **judgments**.
7. Ps 119:52 I remembered thy **judgments** of old, O LORD; and have comforted myself.
8. Ps 119:62 At midnight I will rise to give thanks unto thee because of thy righteous **judgments**.
9. Ps 119:66 Teach me good **judgment** and knowledge: for I have believed thy commandments.
10. Ps 119:75 I know, O LORD, that thy **judgments** are right,
And that thou in faithfulness hast afflicted me.

11. Ps 119:84 How many are the days of thy servant?
When wilt thou execute **judgment** on them that persecute me?
12. Ps 119:91 They continue this day according to thine **ordinances**: for all are thy servants.
13. Ps 119:102 I have not departed from thy **judgments**: for thou hast taught me.
14. Ps 119:106 I have sworn, and I will perform it, that I will keep thy righteous **judgments**.
15. Ps 119:108 Accept, I beseech thee, the freewill offerings of my mouth, O LORD,
And teach me thy **judgments**.
16. Ps 119:120 My flesh trembleth for fear of thee; and I am afraid of thy **judgments**.
17. Ps 119:121 I have done **judgment** and justice: leave me not to mine oppressors.
18. Ps 119:132 Look thou upon me, and be merciful unto me,
As thou **usest (misphat)** to do unto those that love thy name.
19. Ps 119:137 Righteous art thou, O LORD, and upright are thy **judgments**.
20. Ps 119:149 Hear my voice according unto thy lovingkindness: O LORD,
quicken me according to thy **judgment**.
21. Ps 119:156 Great are thy tender mercies, O LORD: quicken me according to thy **judgments**.
22. Ps 119:160 Thy word is true from the beginning:
and every one of thy righteous **judgments** endureth for ever.
23. Ps 119:164 Seven times a day do I praise thee because of thy righteous **judgments**.
24. Ps 119:175 Let my soul live, and it shall praise thee; and let thy **judgments** help me.

7. Law - תורה towrah

1. Ps 119:1 Blessed are the undefiled in the way, who walk in the **law** of the LORD.
2. Ps 119:18 Open thou mine eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of thy **law**.
3. Ps 119:29 Remove from me the way of lying; and grant me thy **law** graciously.
4. Ps 119:34 Give me understanding, and I shall keep thy **law**;
Yea, I shall observe it with my whole heart.
5. Ps 119:44 So shall I keep thy **law** continually for ever and ever.
6. Ps 119:51 The proud have had me greatly in derision: yet have I not declined from thy **law**.
7. Ps 119:53 Horror hath taken hold upon me because of the wicked that forsake thy **law**.
8. Ps 119:55 I have remembered thy name, O LORD, in the night, and have kept thy **law**.
9. Ps 119:61 The bands of the wicked have robbed me: but I have not forgotten thy **law**.
10. Ps 119:70 Their heart is as fat as grease; but I delight in thy **law**.
11. Ps 119:72 The **law** of thy mouth is better unto me than thousands of gold and silver.
12. Ps 119:77 Let thy tender mercies come unto me, that I may live: for thy **law** is my delight.
13. Ps 119:85 The proud have digged pits for me, which are not after thy **law**.
14. Ps 119:92 Unless thy **law** had been my delights, I should then have perished in mine affliction.
15. Ps 119:97 O how love I thy **law**! it is my meditation all the day.
16. Ps 119:109 My soul is continually in my hand: yet do I not forget thy **law**.
17. Ps 119:113 I hate vain thoughts: but thy **law** do I love.
18. Ps 119:126 It is time for thee, LORD, to work: for they have made void thy **law**.
19. Ps 119:136 Rivers of waters run down mine eyes, because they keep not thy **law**.
20. Ps 119:142 Thy righteousness is an everlasting righteousness, and thy **law** is the truth.
21. Ps 119:150 They draw nigh that follow after mischief: they are far from thy **law**.
22. Ps 119:153 Consider mine affliction, and deliver me: for I do not forget thy **law**.
23. Ps 119:163 I hate and abhor lying: but thy **law** do I love.
24. Ps 119:165 Great peace have they which love thy **law**: and nothing shall offend them.
25. Ps 119:174 I have longed for thy salvation, O LORD; and thy **law** is my delight.

8. Way & Ways - דרך derek, ארח 'orach

1. Ps 119:1 Blessed are the undefiled in the **way**, who walk in the law of the LORD.
2. Ps 119:3 They also do no iniquity: they walk in his **ways**.
3. Ps 119:5 O that my **ways** were directed to keep thy statutes!
4. Ps 119:9 Wherewithal shall a young man cleanse his **way**?
By taking heed thereto according to thy word.
5. Ps 119:14 I have rejoiced in the **way** of thy testimonies, as much as in all riches.
6. Ps 119:15 I will meditate in thy precepts, and have respect unto thy **ways**.
7. Ps 119:26 I have declared my **ways**, and thou heardest me: teach me thy statutes.

8. Ps 119:27 Make me to understand the **way** of thy precepts: so shall I talk of thy wondrous works.
9. Ps 119:29 Remove from me the **way** of lying: and grant me thy law graciously.
10. Ps 119:30 I have chosen the **way** of truth: thy judgments have I laid before me.
11. Ps 119:32 I will run the **way** of thy commandments, when thou shalt enlarge my heart.
12. Ps 119:33 Teach me, O LORD, the **way** of thy statutes; and I shall keep it unto the end.
13. Ps 119:37 Turn away mine eyes from beholding vanity; and quicken thou me in thy **way**.
14. Ps 119:59 I thought on my **ways**, and turned my feet unto thy testimonies.
15. Ps 119:101 I have refrained my feet from every evil **way**, that I might keep thy word.
16. Ps 119:104 Through thy precepts I get understanding; therefore I hate every false **way**.
17. Ps 119:128 Therefore I esteem all thy precepts concerning all things to be right;
And I hate every false **way**.
18. Ps 119:168 I have kept thy precepts and thy testimonies: for all my **ways** are before thee.

| Section | Vs | law | testi | monies | walys | precepts | statutes | commandments | judgments | dabar | World |
|------------------|---------|-----|-----------|--------|-------|----------|----------|--------------|-----------|-------|-------|
| | | | עדה, עדות | עדות | דerek | orach | | | | דבר | איור |
| | | | | | | | | | | | imrah |
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| ב - BETH | 9 16 | | | 1 | 1 | 2 | 2 | 1 | 1 | 2 | 1 |
| ג - GIMEL | 17 24 | 1 | 2 | | | | 1 | 2 | 1 | 1 | |
| ד - DALETH | 25 32 | 1 | | 1 | 5 | | 1 | 1 | 1 | 2 | |
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| ו - VAU | 41 48 | 1 | 1 | | | | 1 | 2 | 1 | 2 | 1 |
| ז - ZAIN | 49 56 | 3 | | | | | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 |
| ח - CHETH | 57 64 | 1 | 1 | | 1 | | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 |
| ט - TETH | 65 72 | 2 | | | | | 2 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 |
| י - JOD | 73 80 | 1 | 1 | | | | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 |
| כ - CAPH | 81 88 | 1 | | 1 | | | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 |
| ל - LAMED | 89 96 | 1 | 1 | | | | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | |
| מ - MEM | 97 104 | 1 | | 1 | | 2 | | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 |
| נ - NUN | 105 112 | 1 | | 1 | | | 1 | 1 | 2 | 2 | |
| ס - SAMECH | 113 120 | 1 | 1 | | | | 2 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 |
| ע - AIN | 121 128 | 1 | 1 | | | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 |
| פ - PE | 129 136 | 1 | | 1 | | | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 |
| צ - TZADDI | 137 144 | 1 | 1 | 1 | | | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 |
| ק - KOPH | 145 152 | 1 | 2 | | | | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 |
| ר - RESH | 153 160 | 1 | | 1 | | | 1 | 1 | 2 | 1 | 2 |
| ש - SCHIN | 161 168 | 2 | 2 | | 1 | | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 |
| ט - TAU | 169 176 | 1 | | | | | 1 | 2 | 1 | 1 | 2 |
| Total Use | | 25 | 14 | 9 | 13 | 5 | 22 | 22 | 24 | 23 | 19 |

| Section | Vs | Vs | law | testi | edab, | eduwth | derek | wa | lys | orach | precepts | statutes | commandments | judgments | dabar | Word |
|------------|-----|-----|---------------|------------|-------|--------|-------------------------|----|------------|-------|------------|------------|--------------|------------|------------|------------|
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| ב - BETH | 9 | 16 | :18 | :22, :24 | | :14 | :14 | | :9, :15 | | :15 | :12, :16 | :10 | :13 | :9, :16 | :11 |
| ג - GIMEL | 17 | 24 | :29 | | | | | | | | :27 | :26 | :19, :21 | :20 | :17 | |
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