

Truth for Today

The Bible Explained

For reply: Email: truthfortoday@aol.com

Broadcast Date: 12 May 2019

No.: T1093

Speaker: Mr. Gordon Kell

Psalm 119 - The importance of God's Word: Samech - Psalm 119:113-120

Today we come to the passage in Psalm 119 headed Samech, Psalm 119:113-120. As we have discovered, Psalm 119 has an alphabetical arrangement. The 22 paragraphs of eight verses are headed, in order, by a letter of the Hebrew alphabet.

The psalm is a long collection of meditations on the word of God. Throughout the psalm the word of God is described in ten different ways as follows:

1. The word, "*law*" is used 25 times in the psalm to emphasise the word of God as instruction for life. It is particularly linked with the law outlined in the Pentateuch. The psalmist upholds God's word as that which guides him through life. It teaches us about how God's word guides us spiritually.
2. "*Word*" is used 20 times as a general term for God's revelation. In Deuteronomy 4:13, we read, "*So, He declared to you His covenant which He commanded you to perform, the Ten Commandments; and He wrote them on two tablets of stone.*"

"*Ten commandments*" in Deuteronomy 4:13 has the literal meaning of "*ten words.*" The psalmist uses "*word*" to describe God's revelation to men. It teaches us that God reveals Himself through His word.
3. The word "*Saying*" is used 19 times in the psalm and is sometimes translated, "promise". It teaches us that God has spoken to us in order to bless us.
4. The word "*Commandment*" appears 21 times in the plural as well. The psalmist uses it to refer to definite commands which require obedience. It teaches that God's word requires our obedience.
5. "*Statutes*" occurs 21 times always in the plural. Its literal meaning is "things inscribed" referring to laws. Inscribing has the sense of permanence, and it teaches us about the eternal character of God's word.
6. "*Judgment*" appears 19 times in the plural and four times in the singular. It relates to judicial decisions. In the Pentateuch it referred to the laws which followed the Ten Commandments. "Judgment" teaches us about the application of God's word across all the circumstances of life and the confidence we can have in it.
7. "*Precepts*" occurs 21 times and is used poetically for injunctions. It is only found in the books of Psalms. It teaches about applying God's word to govern our thoughts, words and actions.
8. "*Testimony*" appears 22 times in the plural and conveys a declaration of the will of God. It is usually translated "statutes". It teaches us about the standards of conduct God desires to see in His people.
9. "*Way*" appears five times in the plural and six times in the singular. It teaches us about the pattern of life the word of God outlines for us.
10. A parallel word is "Path". David uses the expression, "*paths of righteousness*" in Psalm 23:3. It teaches us about the witness our lives have when we follow the word of God.

These ten synonyms are used extensively throughout the psalm to focus the reader on the Word of God and the blessings which flow from it when we read it, believe it and obey it.

Alongside these ten synonyms, the psalmist also describes

- his personal delight in God's word;
- his love for God's word;
- his obedience to God's word;
- his meditation of God's word; and
- his joy in God's word.

The psalmist refers to himself as God's servant twelve times. As such the psalmist sought God to refresh and preserve him in his service. The psalmist teaches us about God's sustaining power to undertake and fulfil His will in our lives.

In summary the ten synonyms the psalmist uses in Psalm 119 teach us that God's word,

1. guides us spiritually;
2. reveals God to us;
3. speaks directly to us;
4. requires our obedience;
5. is eternal;
6. can be trusted in all the circumstances of life;
7. governs our thoughts, words and actions;
8. provides standards of conduct;
9. provides a pattern for our lives; and
10. teaches us to be witnesses.

With this in mind let us consider the passage today, Psalm 119:113-120, headed Samech. Samech is the 15th letter in the Hebrew alphabet. The letter Samech has a circular shape and in Jewish thinking is associated with the support which has its source in the infinite power of God. Certainly, the thought of spiritual supports runs through this section of Psalm 119.

It begins with what the psalmist hates and what he loves, *"I hate the double-minded, but I love Your law"* (Psalm 119:113).

It is interesting that the section starts with the thoughts of the mind. Thoughts lead to words and words lead to actions. It is vital as Christians we learn to discern between the thoughts which are damaging to ourselves and others and the thoughts which display the mind of Christ and result in blessing to ourselves and others.

We need to control our thoughts. The psalmist writes about hating vain thoughts or double-mindedness and loving the word of God which sanctifies our thinking. He writes with great clarity.

The psalmist constantly contrasts what is of God and what is not. In this opening verse he contrasts his hatred of double-mindedness with his love for God's law. Being *"double minded"* or, in Moffatt's translation, *"half and half"*, is to be unstable and always doubting the word of God. He contrasts this unhappy condition with his love for the word of God. God's word was the psalmist's constant companion. He loved God's word and lived by its teaching. And he always found in it that which fed and sustained him spiritually and guided him practically.

In the New Testament Paul writes in Colossians 3:1-2, *"If then you were raised with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ is, sitting at the right hand of God. Set your mind on things above, not on things on the earth."*

Then in Colossians 3:5-10, *"Therefore put to death your members which are on the earth: fornication, uncleanness, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry. Because of these things the wrath of God is coming upon the sons of disobedience, in which you yourselves once walked when you lived in them. But now you yourselves are to put off all these: anger, wrath, malice, blasphemy, filthy language out of your mouth. Do not lie to one another, since you have put off the old man with his deeds, and have put on the new man who is renewed in knowledge according to the image of Him who created him."*

Paul also encourages us, in Philippians 2:5-11, to have the mind of Christ and also in 2 Corinthians 10:5 that, *"every thought may be brought into captivity to the obedience of Christ."*

The world struggles to influence our thinking in all kinds of directions, but God appeals to us through His mercies as in Romans 12:1-2, *"I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service. And do not be conformed to this world, but be*

transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God."

It is James in the New Testament who gives us an insight into the character and dangers of double-mindedness: *"If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all liberally and without reproach, and it will be given to him. But let him ask in faith, with no doubting, for he who doubts is like a wave of the sea driven and tossed by the wind. For let not that man suppose that he will receive anything from the Lord; he is a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways"* (James 1:5-8). He adds in James 4:8, *"Come near to God and he will come near to you. Wash your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded."*

After describing his love for God's word in Psalm 119:113, the psalmist, in Psalm 119:114, describes God as his hiding place and his shield. *"You are my hiding place and my shield; I hope in Your word."*

This is a reference to the support and protection God gives and the way His word sustains us spiritually. *"You are my hiding place; You shall preserve me from trouble; You shall surround me with songs of deliverance. Selah"*, Psalm 32:7

A hiding place is a secret safe place. It brings to mind the wings of an eagle referred to by Boaz in Ruth 2:12, *"The LORD repay your work, and a full reward be given you by the LORD God of Israel, under whose wings you have come for refuge."*

The Lord Jesus uses a similar illustration in Matthew 23:37, *"O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the one who kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to her! How often I wanted to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing!"*

These are places of safety and free from conflict. The shield, however, is needed for conflict. It is designed for battle. It protects, defends and defeats the attacks of the enemy, as in Ephesians 6:16, *"above all, taking the shield of faith with which you will be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked one."*

God is also our hiding place and shield. We can rely on his safekeeping through difficult times and the peace of His presence. But we also need to have a daily trust in God. We have a faith which protects us from spiritual and moral attacks. The Roman shield, which Paul was probably thinking of, was a shield which protected the whole body. When it was joined with the shields of other soldiers it provided all-round protection for a group of soldiers. It's not simply that we have faith, but we are part of a fellowship of faith.

The psalmist also expressed a hope in God's word. In Psalm 119:113-114 the psalmist brings before us a love for the word of God, faith in God as His hiding place and shield, and certain hope in the promises the word of God gives. This hope looks at these promises as present and future certainties. In New Testament language hope is described as, *"an anchor for the soul"* (see Hebrews 6:19)

These three thoughts of the hiding place, the shield and the hope remind us of the three vital aspects of our relationship with God through Christ. These are love, faith and hope. His love keeps us safe, our faith proves His faithfulness and our hope is a future certainty.

Psalm 119:115, reads, *"Depart from me, you evildoers, for I will keep the commandments of my God!"*

Psalm 119:115 expresses the essence of the very first psalm. Psalm 1:1 is all about separation from the company of evildoers, *"Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor stands in the path of sinners, nor sits in the seat of the scornful."*

There is no basis of fellowship between the child of God and what is ungodly, sinful and scornful. We have to make sure we are walking with, standing by and sitting in the right company.

Psalm 1:2-3 express a delight in God's word, the blessing it brings and fruitfulness it produces *"But his delight is in the law of the Lord, and in His law he meditates day and night. He shall be like a tree planted by the rivers of water, that brings forth its fruit in its season, whose leaf also shall not wither; and whatever he does shall prosper"* (Psalm 1:2-3).

Psalm 1 ends with the judgment of the ungodly and the value God places on his people: *"The ungodly are not so, but are like the chaff which the wind drives away. Therefore the ungodly shall not stand in the judgment, nor sinners in the congregation of the righteous. For the Lord knows the way of the righteous, but the way of the ungodly shall perish"*, Psalm 1:4-6.

Psalm 1 presents the godly man as someone who walks faithfully before God and finds all his resources in the presence of God. These themes are also found in today's passage, Psalm 119:113-120.

Psalm 119:116 continues the psalmist's thoughts about the importance of dependence upon God, *"Uphold me according to Your word, that I may live; and do not let me be ashamed of my hope."*

The psalmist is upheld by the promises of God declared in His word. These promises are fulfilled in the lives of those who walk humbly before their God (see Micah 6:8). The psalmist trusts God to be faithful to His own word. He appeals to God to uphold him so that he can live for God. He prays that he might live in a way which witnesses to the faithfulness of God.

Again, the psalmist uses the word, "hope". His hope was in God. He didn't want his life to be inconsistent with his hope. He knew God would not fail but the psalmist was concerned about his own failure. Sometimes we feel like this. We truly believe in God's faithfulness, but we are concerned about our own frailties. We should always be aware of our weakness but never cease to have confidence in our God. In the New Testament, hope is presented as a future certainty. This is different to the way to how we often use it. In everyday speech we use hope to describe uncertainty. It may happen, it may not.

The writer of Hebrews describes it in this way, *"We have this hope as an anchor for the soul, firm and secure, It enters the inner sanctuary behind the curtain"* (Hebrews 6:19).

John writes that, *"Beloved, now we are children of God; and it has not yet been revealed what we shall be, but we know that when He is revealed, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is. And everyone who has this hope in Him purifies himself, just as He is pure"* (1 John 3:2-3).

Our hope is in Christ. It is a transforming hope which should change us into His likeness.

Although the psalmist didn't have the New Testament revelation of the Christian's hope, he nevertheless prays for God's strength to enable him to live a consistent life of faith, *"Hold me up, and I shall be safe, and I shall observe Your statutes continually"* (Psalm 119:117).

In his first appeal to God to uphold him he was thinking of the power this would give him to live for God. In the second appeal he sees that God power to uphold him brings security and the opportunity to witness to God through his obedience: *"I shall observe Your statutes continually."*

"Statutes", as mentioned earlier literally means "things inscribed". It conveys a sense of permanence, and it teaches us about the eternal character of God's word - it does not pass away. *"Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words will by no means pass away"*, Matthew 24:35

The psalmist expresses his dependence upon God and he also expresses his understanding that his life and its value as a witness to God rests entirely upon the sustaining power of God. This is a reminder of what Jesus explains to us in John 15:5, *"I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing."*

In contrast with walking in dependence upon God the Psalmist highlights God's judgment of those who turn away from His word and also exposes their deceitful character. *"You reject all those who stray from Your statutes, for their deceit is falsehood"* (Psalm 119:118).

The psalmist desires to keep close to God and to draw on God's sustaining power in order to live for Him. But he also wisely observes the pattern of life of those who have turned away from God and the deceit which marks their lives. They expected God's blessing but lived lives of disobedience. The psalmist teaches us on the one hand to stay close to the Saviour and at the same time to beware of being drawn into a pattern of life based on the rejection of God and His claims upon us.

"You put away all the wicked of the earth like dross; Therefore I love Your testimonies" (Psalm 119:119).

In Psalm 119:119, the psalmist views the judgment of God upon the wicked. He looks on to God's perfect judgment and the day when He will act in complete righteousness and justice. In contrast he loves God's testimonies and promises they give of God's present and future blessings.

Our passage ends with Psalm 119:120: *"My flesh trembles for fear of You, and I am afraid of Your judgment"*

The psalmist has a vivid sense of the greatness and holiness of God. He was also afraid of God's judgment.

It is only when we come to the New Testament that we understand that God has done everything to meet all His holy requirements so that we can? become His children. He did this at His own cost through His Son Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ answered all our need at the Cross of Calvary when in love He took our place.

Through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ we learn His love has made it possible for us to know peace with God (Romans 5:1), the peace of God (Philippians 4:7) and the God of peace (Hebrews 13:20). As a result of our faith in Him we do not tremble nor are we afraid because through Christ, and in the words of another psalm, *"Mercy and truth have met together; Righteousness and peace have kissed"* (Psalm 85:10).

Let us rejoice in Christ's love, obey His word and seek to worship, follow and serve our Saviour.

Thank you for listening to the *Truth for Today* talk, Psalm 119, The Importance of God's Word, Psalm 119:113-120, Samech. This was part of a series on Psalm 119. Talk number T1093.

Please Note:

We encourage you to use this transcript for your personal or group Bible studies. This material should not, however, be used in any publications without the express permission from Truth for Today, whose contact details can be found on page 1. Large Print copies of this document are also available upon request.