

June 30, 2019

The Self-Watch of an Experimental Christian

Psalm 119:9-16

What is an experimental Christian?

We recently began a new series from Psalm 119 on the topic of experimental Christianity. Experimental Christianity is simply Biblical Christianity. The Reformers called it *experimental* to draw attention to the fact that God's Word is meant to test us, and prove us, to put us on trial. Ultimately we are not the ones who analyze and investigate Scripture; rather it is Scripture that analyzes and investigates us.

Psalm 139: A test case

For example, in Psalm 139, the Psalmist spends 22 verses extolling the attributes of God.

He speaks of God's omniscience (v.1-2): "O LORD, you have searched me and known me! You know when I sit down and when I rise up; you discern my thought from afar."

He speaks of God's omnipresence (v.7): "Where shall I go from your Spirit? Or where shall I flee from your presence?"

He speaks of God's intimate and supreme creativity (v.13): "For you formed my inward parts; you knitted me together in my mother's womb."

He speaks of God's personal love (v.17-18): "How precious to me are your thoughts, O God! How vast is the sum of them! If I would count them, they are more than the sand."

And then the Psalmist turns to his own heart and asks God to operate on it that these most precious might transform him (v.23-24): “Search me, O God, and know my heart! Try me and know my thoughts! And see if there be any grievous way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting.”

You see the Psalmist didn't settle for *mere* notions of God in the mind. He cried out that they impact his heart, and change the way that He lives. That's experimental Christianity. So when we come to any text in the Bible, we need to be *experimental* with it. “Is this happening to me? Is my life reflecting what the Bible says it should be reflecting?”

The experimental Christian in Psalm 119

That's what Psalm 119 is all about. Constructed as an acrostic of the Hebrew Alphabet, each section covers a different letter. It is literally the A-Z of the Christian life. Last we looked at the blessedness of an experimental Christian. We discovered that *only* Christians are truly happy. I use that word with no apologies. v.1 says “Blessed are those whose way is blameless.” That is a description of every person who has been born again. The Psalmist is *not* describing a special class of Christians. He's *not* describing merely pastors or missionaries or those dedicated to full time vocational ministry. No blameless is what every Christian is. **Colossians 1:22** “And you...he [Christ] has now reconciled in his body of flesh by his death, in order to present you holy and *blameless* and above reproach before him...”¹ This is the scandal of the gospel. God counts you blameless not because you have led a blameless life, but rather because Christ *has*. Dear believer, your sin was placed on Him at Calvary, and when He died your sin died with Him. “There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus” (**Romans 8:1**). That is your position in Christ. Blameless.

¹ Ephesians 1:4 “...even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him.”

Our position and condition in Christ

Then the Psalmist turned to his condition. Remember he cried out in v.5 “Oh that my ways may be steadfast in keeping your statutes!” On the one hand he was blameless (v.1)—that’s his position. On the other, he knew he was falling short of walking in the law of the Lord—that’s his condition. You have to learn these categories. Position and condition. You have a position and a condition in Christ. Your *position* in Christ is your legal status, you have been justified. Christ has freed you from the penalty of sin. Your *condition* in Christ is your present experience. You are being sanctified. Christ is freeing you progressively from the power of sin.

Your position: freed from the penalty of sin.

Your condition: being freed from the power of sin.

Jesus taught these categories dramatically when He washed His disciples’ feet. Do you remember what He said? “The one who has bathed does not need to wash...” That’s our *position*. We don’t need to be washed (or saved) over and over again. At the point of the new birth, we have been made clean once for all. Yet Jesus continues “The one who has bathed does not need to wash, *except for his feet*.” Our feet, where we walk in the world, as it were; where we stray from the path; where we wander into dark places; our feet is what need continual cleansing. That is our condition.

How can a young man keep his way pure?

It’s to our condition that the Psalmist turns to this morning in v.9-16. He asks the question “How can a young man *keep* his way pure?” Charles Spurgeon said of this verse that “there was never a more important question for any one...” to ask.² Why? Why is purity so vital? The Christian does not pursue purity as an end *in itself*. Purity is not an end. Purity is a means to an end. Jesus

² Charles Spurgeon, *The Golden Alphabet: An Exposition of Psalm 119*, (Abbotsford, WI.,: Aneko Press, 2018), pg. 24

points to the end in **Matthew 5:6** “Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.” This is the whole purpose of Christianity. “O Lord, Thy presence is the joy and the life of our life.”³ This is the *summum bonum*, the highest good, that good from which nothing greater can be conceived. That’s why the Psalmist asks this question at the very beginning of his journey with us. He wants us to understand how we can keep our way pure, so that we can find what our souls long for the most: communion with God.

☆The Problem of Purity

☆The Power for Purity

☆The Pleasure of Purity

The Big Idea...

The Christian must engage in a holy self-watch *so that* He can see the blessed God

I. The Problem of Purity

Young men *only*?

Let’s look at **v.9**. This is the first question that the Psalmist asks: “How can a young man keep his way pure?” First of all, the Psalmist is not *merely* concerned with young men only. He has women in mind as well. We’ve adopted this same way of speaking, we call humanity “mankind” though it is made up of both men and women, boys and girls. This is poetry remember.

³ *The Daily Prayer Book*, Ed. John Stoughton, (London, England, : Butter & Tanner, The Selwood Printing Works, 1892), pg. 27

“How can a young man keep his way pure?” is more poetic and less awkward than “How can a young man or young woman keep their way pure.”

The assumptions behind the question

The important question for us is this: What are the assumptions behind this question? What truths is he taking for granted in asking this question?

Truth #1: The Psalmist assumes God wants young children to follow Him.

Boys and girls listen carefully. God is not waiting for you to become an adult for you to follow Him. He wants you to follow Jesus now. The Bible is full of stories of God calling young people and children to follow him. David was just a young lad when God told Samuel to anoint him as king (1 **Samuel 16**). God used the faith of a little slave girl to point her master Naaman, who had leprosy, to Elisha the prophet in Israel (2 **Kings 5**). The boy Daniel and his young friends resolved not to defile themselves with the king of Babylon’s food and God gave them great favor (**Daniel 1**). Children don’t wait to follow the Lord. The great prince of preachers Charles Spurgeon said “Oh to be with God early in life⁴...It is a pity to miss this blessedness...for a year, or even for a day or an hour.”⁵

Truth #2: The Psalmist assumes that sin begins at birth

Can you hear the *wonder* in the Psalmist’s question? “*How* can a young man keep his way pure?” *How?* How can a young man keep his way pure, when he begins so impure? Children, do you know *why* you can be so cruel to your siblings? Or *why* you enjoy it when somebody else fails and you don’t and so you feel better than them? Or *why* you don’t like people telling you what to do? Because your first love is sin. You were born loving sin. **Genesis 8:21** says “The intention of man’s heart is evil from *youth*.” From youth! That’s what’s wrong

⁴ Charles Spurgeon, *The Golden Alphabet: An Exposition of Psalm 119*, (Abbotsford, WI.,: Aneko Press, 2018), pg. 24

⁵ *ibid*, pg. 27

with you. And this is what is wrong with all the world. Parents please don't shield your children from the monstrosities that are happening in the world. They need to see them. They need to ask: "Daddy, mommy, why do people act like that?" And you need to be able to tell them: "That's what sin does children." The reason why men act like women and women like men is because of *sin*. The reason why this country tells you that you can legally kill your children is because of *sin*. Take any problem, any misery in the world, anything that leads to suffering and trace it back to its source. You'll find that it comes from the heart of sinful man somewhere. That's why this question the Psalmist is asking is so profound. How can a young man keep his way pure in such a world teeming with impurity?

Truth #3: The Psalmist assumes the new birth

The Psalmist does *not* ask: "How can a young man *make* his way pure" but "how can a young man *keep* his way pure." We are not given a rule here to save ourselves. Psalm 119 describes what a Christian looks like not how to become a Christian. He's assuming the new birth. He's assuming that God has already made you a Christian by the washing of regeneration and renewal by the Holy Spirit. If you are listening this morning and you have not been born again, you are in the most miserable condition, because you are still under the penalty of sin. On that dreadful day of judgment, all the sea will give up the dead who are in it. Death and Hades will give up the dead who are in them. No one will be able to hide from Him who sits on the great white throne. All will be judged, each soul, every soul, according to what they have done.⁶ You will be weeping at that judgment if you did not place all your hope in Christ in this life. You will see the holiness and beauty of God and you will condemn yourself for not placing your trust in Him. Place your hope in Christ. The Scripture makes this solemn promise "Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only Son of God" (**John 3:18**).

⁶ Revelation 21:11-13

Truth #4: The Psalmist assumes that purity is the greatest difficulty a Christian faces

So this verse is speaking to God's people—to Christians, and the question is pressing: *how* can we keep pure? You hear the Psalmist is implying that this is the most difficult task. So what does he mean by pure? He means to be separate, or to be free of any mixture of ungodliness. Purity is what we are always seeking after. We want *pure* water. There is some water that is not safe to drink. If you drink impure water, you can get really sick. People spend a lot of money on filtered water to keep up their health. We desire pure air. When Justus was born, he was extremely sick, we had to put him in an oxygen tent to make sure all the air he was getting was pure. We want pure marriages. Where we stay faithful to our spouses and then stay faithful to us. To be pure *spiritually speaking* is no different. It means that we would be free of sin, and guilt, and vice. To be pure means that we would have a “singleness” of heart towards God. **Psalm 86:11** gives us one of the best definitions of purity. The Psalmist prays “...unite my heart to fear your name.”

That is the trouble isn't it? Our hearts are divided. We are spiritual schizophrenics. “One part of me wants to know God and worship God and please God; but another part wants something else.”⁷ No doubt you felt that spiritual schizophrenia as you prepared to come to church this morning. On the one hand, there's a part of you that has tasted and seen that God is good, and you are longing to drink that river of delight once again. On the other hand, you inwardly sigh that you have to come to church and do your duty. ‘Can't I just be free, can't I just do what I want?’ Those two parts are mixed together and so you are at war—constant war all the time. Paul said it like this: “For I delight in the law of God, in my inner being, *but* I see in my members another law *waging war* against the law of my mind and making me captive to the law of sin that dwells in my members” (**Romans 7:22-23**). The pursuit of purity is the great difficulty of the Christian life.

⁷ D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *Studies in the Sermon on the Mount, 2nd Edition*, (Grand Rapids, MI.: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1976), pg. 94-95

Truth #5: The Psalmist assumes that true Christians will pursue purity

The Psalmist is challenging what many professing Christians assume about salvation. Many believe that pursuing holiness is optional in the Christian life, like we can take it or leave it: ‘some Christians simply choose to pursue holiness, and others choose not to pursue holiness. It’s really up to you.’ But the Psalmist doesn’t assume that. He assumes what the rest of the Bible teaches about the gospel. The Apostle Paul said this: “For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation to all men, instructing us to deny ungodliness and worldly desires and to live sensibly, righteously and godly in the present age...” (Titus 2:11-12). Did you hear what he said? The grace of God appeared to do two things. Not one thing. Two things. 1) It appeared “bringing salvation”—that’s Jesus paying the penalty of sin and 2) It appeared “instructing us to deny ungodliness...to live righteously and godly in the present age—that’s Jesus breaking the power of sin.”⁸ Jesus does not do one without the other. That’s like the husband who imagines that he’s married because he has a ring on, but refuses to live with his wife. J.C. Ryle has said “We must be holy, because this is one grand end and purpose for which Christ came into the world...Jesus is a complete Savior. He does not merely take away the guilt of a believer’s sin, he does more—he breaks its power.”⁹

So let’s test ourselves: is it your desire to pursue purity in life? Are you seeking to rid your life of those things that prevent you from having an undivided heart before God? If I don’t want purity then I must still be dead in my trespasses and sins. I can’t be a Christian if that desire for holiness is not in my heart. I can’t be a Christian if there is no desire to please God in how I live.

That’s our **first point**. The problem of purity is the great problem in the Christian life.

⁸ J. Stephen Yuille, *The Path of Life: Blessedness in Seasons of Lament*, (Grand Rapids, MI.: Reformation Heritage Books, 2019), pg. 26

⁹ *ibid*

II. The Power for Purity

The power for purity comes from the Word

How does the Psalmist answer his question? Please look again at **v.9** “How can a young man keep his way pure? By guarding it according to your word.” How wonderful! God has given us His Word as a *guard*. What do guards do? They protect you. They defend you. They keep safe. But even better than these, a guard fights your battles for you. If you pull up the footage of John Hinkley Jr. attempting to assassinate Ronald Reagan, you’ll see how his secret service forced Reagan into the back of the car at the risk of their own lives. They charged the gunman and threw him down to the ground. They fought in Reagan’s stead. That’s what guards do. They fight for you. That’s the imagery here in **v.9**. The Word of God fights for you. It guards your purity. How?

The word of God comforts us so we don’t have to turn to worldly comfort. **v.50** “This is my comfort in my affliction, that your promise gives me life.”

The word of God gives us light when all around is darkness. **v.105** “Your word is lamp to my feet and a light to my path.”

The word of God teaches us not to be alarmed when persecution arises. **John 15:18** “If the world hates you, know that it has hated me before it hated you.”

The word of God warns you against the danger of apostasy. **Luke 9:61** “No one who puts his hand to the plow and looks back is fit for the kingdom of God.”

The word of God strengthens the doubting heart that can’t find his assurance. **John 6:37** “...whoever comes to me I will never cast out.”

The word of God gives us strength to go on even in the face of our own sin. 1 **John 1:7** “...the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin.”

Only the Word can do these and a million other things. It’s why the Psalmist says in **v.14** “In the way of your testimonies I delight *as much as in all riches.*” Dear saint, the Word of God is the most valuable possession you own. It guards that which is most dear to you: your eternal soul. Oh how careless Christians can be with their own soul. How often do we guard other things with more zeal?

The danger of half-hearted Christianity

But the Word is not enough! Look at the first part of **v.10** “With my *whole heart* I seek you...” Half-hearted Christianity is dangerous.¹⁰ Think about King David for a moment. He didn’t decide one day out of the blue that he was going to commit adultery and murder. No those sins began days before. Go back and read the account. You’ll see that David started compromising long before that fateful night. Half-hearted Christianity always takes incremental steps. Charles Hodge shows us what form these steps take.

1. The neglect of fellowship with God.¹¹
2. The neglect of the means of grace.¹²
3. Neglect in watching the heart, the thoughts, and the words.
4. Conformity to the world.
5. Commission of open sin.¹³

¹⁰ “In a careless or half-hearted state, wanderings are not watched...Secret prayer will be hurried over, worldly thoughts unresisted, waste of time in frivolous pursuits indulged, without much concern.” Charles Bridges, *An Exposition of Psalm 119*, (Carlisle, PA.,: The Banner of Truth Trust, Reprint 2002), pg. 21

¹¹ What is the first to go in a backsliding heart? It is not the reading of the Scriptures per se. Backsliders can converse with the Scriptures. No the first thing to go is a true communion with God, the first thing to go is seeking God with our whole hearts. It’s seeking Him disinterestedly.

¹² I combined Hodge’s neglecting of private duties and outward duties into one.

¹³ Charles Hodge, *Princeton Sermons: Outlines of Discourses Doctrinal and Practical*, (Carlisle, PA.,: The Banner of Truth Trust, Reprint 2011), pg. 112-113

So when the Psalmist says “With my whole heart I seek you...” He’s showing us something very important. You will not stay pure if you seek after God half-heartedly.

The power for purity comes by calling on the LORD

But notice that he is not resting in his own ability to seek God. He immediately fires off a prayer of desperation to heaven. At the end of **v.10** he says “...let me not *wander* from your commandments!” I think this is where the hymn writer found his inspiration when he wrote:

Prone to wander Lord I feel it,
Prone to leave the God I love.
Here’s my heart, Lord, take and seal it,
Seal it for Thy courts above.¹⁴

There’s no self-confidence here. *Though* he is using the Word to guard his way (**v.9**), *though* he is seeking God with his whole heart (**v.10**), he knows that without the immediate assistance of the Holy Spirit, he will stray from the path. Calvin says here “...such is our liability to err, that we immediately relapse into sin the instant he leaves us to ourselves.”¹⁵ Do you know that about yourself? Do you know that you are that prone to wander? This is one of the marvelous evidences that the Word of God is the Word of God. It knows more about your heart than you do. Before you are ever aware of your straying heart, it tells you.

There was a story about three years ago from Tasmania about this sheep who had gone astray from her owner and was lost for six years. Her wool became so thick, she literally looked like a walking couch. She was found on the side of the road unable to move because of the amount of wool in its fleece. When she was finally shorn she produced 46 pounds of wool. Monica commented on how sheep were designed specifically by God to be cared for. If

¹⁴ Come Thou Fount by Robert Robinson

¹⁵ John Calvin, *Calvin’s Commentaries Vol. VI*, (Grand Rapids, MI.,: BakerBooks, 2009), pg. 409

there were no shepherds all sheep would die because they lack the ability to care for themselves. Is it any wonder why we are called sheep in Scripture? We can't care for ourselves.

You see the psalmist is praying the prayer of our heart in v.10: Oh Lord "...let me not *wander* from your commandments!" The Word by itself is *not enough*. Seeking God with all your heart is *not enough*. You need Divine help. You must call upon the Lord for help. That's what prayer is. It's calling on the Good Shepherd for help. It's saying 'O Lord...I have nothing which I have not received from Your Hand.¹⁶ Were I actually to obey all You command, I would still be but unprofitable servants for I have only done what is my duty.¹⁷ All my successes are traced back to your grace.¹⁸ Dear saint, don't you see how God is glorified in that type of dependence? He doesn't despise it when we pray these desperate types of prayers. He loves it. He delights in our dependence upon Him, because He loves to supply all our needs. **Psalm 50:15** "...call upon me in the day of trouble; I will deliver you, and you shall glorify me."

The power for purity comes by hiding God's Word away

But there is one more source of power for purity for the Psalmist. Please look at v.11 "I have stored up your word in my heart, that I might not sin against you." Other translations say "I have hidden your word"¹⁹ or "I have treasured your word."²⁰ The Psalmist doesn't have a causal acquaintance with the Word, he has put it to memory. You see *mere* acquaintance with the word will not do you any good.²¹ Imagine going to a restaurant *just* to look at the pictures of food on the menu. Day after day, you go in, and look, but you never order. You will

¹⁶ 1 Corinthians 4:7

¹⁷ Luke 17:10

¹⁸ Psalm 115:1

¹⁹ NIV

²⁰ NASB

²¹ J. Stephen Yuille, *The Path of Life: Blessedness in Seasons of Lament*, (Grand Rapids, MI.,: Reformation Heritage Books, 2019), pg. 29

starve. You must actually order the food. You must ingest it, digest it, hide in in your bowels. That's where the Word will do you good. Imagine if you had everything stripped away from you and were thrown in prison. It's not hard to imagine. We have Christian brothers and sisters rotting away in prison in countries where Christianity is illegal. What would you take with you to prison? Only what you have hid away in your heart. When Jonah was in the belly of the great fish, how did he comfort himself? He prayed God's Word back to God. Go and look. You'll see. Every part of His prayer comes from the Psalms. Brothers and sisters we must recover the idea of Scripture memorization. The connection between prayer in v.10 and storing up God's Word in your heart in v. 11 is vital. Prayer and the activity of the Word must accompany each other. Charles Spurgeon gave this illustration once of a little girl who recited her lessons very well at boarding-school. The headmaster commended her. Another little girl who was always did her work poorly asked her:

“How is it that you always say your lessons so perfectly?’ She replied, “I always *pray* that I may say my lessons well.’ ‘Do you?’ replied the other, ‘then I’ll pray too.’ But alas! next morning she could not repeat one word of her lesson. Very much confounded, she ran to her friend. ‘I prayed,’ said she, ‘but I could not repeat a word of my lesson.’ ‘Perhaps,’ rejoined the other, ‘you took no *pains* to learn it.’ ‘Learn it! learn it!’ answered the first, ‘I did not learn it at all. I didn’t know I needed to learn it...”²²

Prayer and the activity are both needed.²³ So let's test ourselves: Are you letting the Word guard your soul? It is fighting for you? Are you putting yourself under it's protection? Are you calling on God to stop you from wandering away from Him? Or are you the sheep that is paralyzed because you

²² Charles H. Spurgeon, *Feathers For Arrows: Illustrations For Preachers and Teachers*, (Grand Rapids, MI.,: Reformation Heritage Books), pg. 168-169

²³ When one my sons was first learning to ride their bike...they needed to exert all their energy, yet if I took my hand off of them, they would fall.

have strayed to far? If so, then call Him now my friend. He loves to hear His sheep bleating out for help. That's our **second point**. The power for purity come from the Word, from calling on the Lord in prayer and from hiding the Word in our hearts.

III. The Pleasure of Purity

The beating heart of a Christian

Now we didn't deal with the last part of v.11, so let's look at that now. And this gets the very heart of the Psalmist's burden. Why should we care about keeping our way pure? (v.9) Why should we call on Him in desperate prayer? (v.10). Why should we store up the word in our heart? (v.11) So that "I might not sin against you." Do you see how utterly God-centered he is. This is what is in the heart of every true Christian. This is the main difference between those who are born of of the Spirit and those who are still dead in their sins. The worldly man knows that he sins. He has a guilty conscience. His own heart stands as his accuser. But if he tries to live a moral life, he only does so because it's convenient for his advancement, or because he doesn't want to be ashamed, or because he wants to be well thought of. So he avoids wrong entirely for his own sake.

But a Christian wants to avoid sin, because all sin is *against* God. The whole object and aim and purpose of Christianity is to bring us back into a right relationship with God. That's what sin ruined. The one invariable longing of all the saints in Scripture is that no matter what else they lost, no matter what they had to forfeit or suffer, they had to have God, they had to see Him. **Psalm 42:1-2** "As a deer pants for flowing streams, so pants my soul for you, O God. My soul thirsts for God, for the living God. When shall I come and appear before God?" Why? Why this longing for God? Why is there it desire in the hearts of true Christians to not sin against Him?

Why is God the “*blessed God*?”

Because He is the most blessed God. Look with me at v.12. This is the climax of the Psalmist’s argument. “Blessed are you, O Lord; teach me your statutes!” Blessed are you, O Lord!! How are we to understand that? I’ve not read a better explanation of these 5 words than how Puritan George Swinnock puts it:

“God is all good things, and every good thing. He is self-sufficient, alone-sufficient, and all-sufficient. Nothing is lacking in him—either for the soul’s protection from all evil, or for the soul’s perfection with all good. [God’s being blessed means] you would find in him whatever your heart could desire and whatever could lead you to happiness.

Are you ambitious? God is a crown of glory.

Are you covetous? God is unsearchable riches.

Are you lustful? God is rivers of pleasure and fullness of joy.

Are you hungry? God is a feast.

Are you weary? God is rest—a shadow from the heat and shelter from the storm.

Are you weak? God is everlasting strength.

Are you in doubt? God is marvelous in counsel.

Are you darkness? God is the Sun of righteousness, an eternal light.

Are you sick? He is the God of your health.

Are you sorrowful? He is the God of all comfort.

Are you dying? He is the fountain of life.

Are you in distress? His name is a strong tower, to which you may run to find safety.

He is a universal remedy against all sorts of misery. Whatever your calamity, he can remove it. Whatever your necessity, he can relieve it. He is silver, gold, honor, delight, food, clothing, house, land, peace, wisdom, power, beauty, father, mother, wife, husband, mercy, love, grace, glory, and infinitely more than all these.”²⁴

This is the great burden of the Psalmist. Dear believer purity is never for purity’s sake. What would that even mean? Memorizing is never for memory’s sake. Prayer is never for prayer’s sake. These things are *means* that place our cold and dull souls in front of the blazing fire of God’s all-consuming blessedness. When this happens all duty becomes delight. All holiness becomes happiness. And that is how the Psalmist communicates in the rest of this section.

v.13 “With my lips I declare all the rules of your mouth.”

v.15 “I will meditate on your precepts and fix my eyes on your ways.”

v.16 “I will delight in your statutes; I will not forget your word.”

Can you hear the shift? In v.9-11, there is an emphasis on purity. In v.12-16 he explodes into passion. Oh if you could just make adopt this paradigm shift in your heart, your Christianity would never be the same. Spurgeon put it like this: “You can be certain that he who prays for holiness will one day praise God for happiness.”²⁵ Isaac Watts penned it in a poem:

Then shall my heart have inward joy,
And keep my face from shame,
When all they statutes I obey,
And honor all thy name.²⁶

²⁴ J. Stephen Yuille, *The Path of Life: Blessedness in Seasons of Lament*, (Grand Rapids, MI.: Reformation Heritage Books, 2019), pg. 14

²⁵ Charles Spurgeon, *The Golden Alphabet: An Exposition of Psalm 119*, (Abbotsford, WI.: Aneko Press, 2018), pg. 19

²⁶ *ibid*

Where is Jesus Christ?

But the true joy in this passage is in its foreshadows. There is no doubt that the Psalmist has pressed on us the importance and responsibility of carefully watching over our walk. But he is preparing us for something deeper. Yes, “I must do everything I can *and* still know it is not enough.”²⁷ It will never be enough. **Luke 17:10** “So you also, when you have done all that you were commanded, say, ‘We are unworthy servants; we have only done what was our duty.’” After living a life time of watching over our souls, the Bible says, we are still unworthy.

So then what is your hope? Not in how you live, but in how Jesus lived. Jesus said in **John 17:9** “And for their sake (that is, for believers) I consecrate myself, that they also may be sanctified in truth.” What did He mean by saying “I consecrate myself?” He meant “I lived the pure life. I’m the only One who ever has. I’m the only One who as a young man has kept his way pure. I’m the only One who has sought God with my whole heart. I’m the only one who has not sinned against God, not because I had to store up the Word in my Heart, but because I am the Word.” That’s your hope beloved. And not only did He keep His way pure for you, but “He Himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness. By his wounds you have been healed” (**1 Peter 2:24**).

That is your only hope. You are in His hands. And now you are free to live a life set apart for Him. Jesus said “Already you are clean because of the word that I have spoken to you” (**John 15:3**). Already you are clean. So be clean.

That’s our **third point**. The pleasure of purity is that we gain the blessed God. And Christ has already lived the perfect life of purity for us. You have been freed from sin to live like Him.

²⁷ D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *Studies in the Sermon on the Mount, 2nd Edition*, (Grand Rapids, MI.,: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1976), pg. 99

Application

1. What kind of a Word has God given us?

God has given us a Word that we can store up in our heart. There can be no doubt that God intended on His word to be memorized. So we need to ask, how does memorization give you the word differently than just reading it, or even hearing it preached? Well what does memorizing force you to do? It forces you to slow down. And that forces you to meditate on the Word. The goal of the Word is internalization. That's what memorizing and meditation does. As one author has said "Meditation is to your inner person what digestion is to your body."²⁸ I have a dear friend who has a condition which makes it so she can't digest her food. She's very very sick because of it. She can eat food but her body won't absorb what she needs for daily living. Likewise, if you never memorize or meditate on the Word, how much are you actually internalizing, and absorbing it? How much are you retaining? It's not the breadth of your reading that will affect you, it's the depth of it. John Piper says it like this: "Take two hours to ask ten questions of **Galatians 2:20** (in which time you will have memorized it), and you will gain one hundred times the insight you would have attained by quickly reading thirty pages of the New Testament or any other book. Slow down. Query. Ponder. Chew."²⁹

No doubt some of you are saying under your breath "But I have a really bad memory, and I don't retain anything." J. Stephen Yuille recounts the story of an old man who had the same problem and he visited his pastor to tell him about it. He said, "Pastor, I try to remember what you teach in your sermons, and I try to remember Bible verses, but I listen and forget and memorize and forget. I feel like a cup—filled with holes—that is constantly dipped into a bucket of water. By the time the cup reaches my lips, the water has spilled out of the holes." [Ahhhh!] the pastor replied "[But] just think about how clean that

²⁸ Warren Wiersbe, *With the Word: The Chapter-by-Chapter Bible Handbook*, (Nashville, TN.,: Thomas Nelson Publisher, 1991), pg. 388

²⁹ John Piper, *Brothers We Are Not Professionals*, (Nashville, TN.,: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 2002), pg. 75

cup is.”³⁰ Oh he’s right isn’t he? That’s what Christ does with us. He cleanses us by the washing with water with the word (**Eph. 5:26**). If you can’t retain things for very long, I would tell you not to give up.³¹ Keep trying. Because if it leaks out, think how clean your cup will be.

2. What kind of a world do we live in?

We live in world that doesn’t see how delightful God’s law really is. **v.16** says “I will *delight* in your statutes, I will not forget your word.” C.S. Lewis wrestled through the idea of God’s law being a delight. He said “[The Psalmist’s] delight in the Law is a delight in having touched firmness; like the pedestrian’s delight in feeling the hard road beneath his feet after a false short cut has long entangled him in muddy fields.”³² What a picture! The world that the Psalmist lived in, Lewis continued, of “...sacred prostitution, sacred sodomy, and the babies thrown into the fire for Moloch—[made] his own “Law” as he turned back to it [shine] with extraordinary radiance.”³³ Never in my lifetime has the contrast between God’s law and the laws of this world been so stark. We have an opportunity to share the gospel to the lost by walking pleasant and firm road of God’s law, as opposed to the sinking mire of the world. The Christian who walks circumspectly with God’s law is noticed by the world. Because their feet walk firmly, their hearts love largely, and their lives point steadfastly to the glory of God.

3. What kind of a church should we want?

³⁰ J. Stephen Yuille, *The Path of Life: Blessedness in Seasons of Lament*, (Grand Rapids, MI.,: Reformation Heritage Books, 2019), pg.33

³¹ Charles Bridges gives some additional reasons for why the memorization of the Word is difficult. Charles Bridges, *An Exposition of Psalm 119*, (Carlisle, PA.,: The Banner of Truth Trust, Reprint 2002), pg. 35

³² C.S. Lewis, *The Beloved Works of C.S. Lewis*, (Grand Rapids, MI.,: Family Christian Press), pg. 162-163

³³ *ibid*, pg. 163

We should want the type of church that is not merely concerned with individual purity but with corporate purity. Last week talked about expressive individualism. And we know that simply because we are Americans, expressive individualism is part of our cultural DNA. That will effect the way that we hear this message. We could apply it in a way that completely ignores one another. But the Bible continually presses on us a bigger vision. Listen to how **Hebrews 3:12-13** presses us to help others pursue this purity the Psalmist is speaking about. “Take care, brothers, lest there be in any of you an evil, unbelieving heart, leading you to fall away from the living God. But exhort one another every day, as long as it is called “today,” that none of you may be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin.” Exhort one another THAT none of you may be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin. The ethic of the Bible is that exercise watch over each other. That’s what it means to be a Christian. So look around the church. Observe. Who needs some one to talk to? Who’s alone? Go to that person, encourage them. Are there people who need a ride to church? Offer them a ride. Look through the membership directory, who haven’t you seen in a while? Call them up, find out what’s going on in their lives. Have people, not just families, but single people over to your house. Make lunch appointments with brothers or sisters in order to build them up in the faith. Agree to read a good Christian book with someone.³⁴ Taking that first step with someone is often all someone needs. You have no idea how many people are struggling to keep their way pure right now. Oh the possibilities for you to help someone to recover their footing.³⁵

³⁴ All these practical suggestions came from Mark Dever’s *The Deliberate Church*, (Wheaton, IL.,: Crossway, 2005), pg. 198

³⁵ That’s what the Christian of Psalm 119 does. **v.13** “With my lips I declare all the rules of your mouth.”

4. What kind of Savior do we need?³⁶

We need a Christ who doesn't merely free us from the penalty of sin (justification) nor merely from the presence of sin (glorification), but One who frees us now from the power of sin (sanctification). We need a whole Christ. Dear believer, don't reduce the gospel. Don't look at Psalm 119 and say, "that doesn't apply to me, I don't need to do that." "If I don't want to be like this...I'm afraid it just means I am not a Christian...I must be 'dead in trespasses and sins'; I can never have received new life."³⁷ A true Christian desires to please the Lord. A true Christians wants to hide the Word in his heart so that he would not sin against God. If you say, "But pastor Josh, this is so hard, and I fail at it all the time." I would say, of course you do. That's why you need a Savior who doesn't depend upon you for your sanctification. **Philippians 1:6** "And I am sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ." That's the kind of Savior you have.

³⁶ With the exception of the first question, the last three are from Christopher Ash, *Job: The Wisdom of the Cross, Preaching the Word Series*, (Wheaton, IL.: Crossway, 2014), pg. 17-23

³⁷ D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *Studies in the Sermon on the Mount, 2nd Edition*, (Grand Rapids, MI.: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1976), pg. 99