

Psalm 119 (Part Two)

How I Love Your Law

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As I contemplated this sermon for the first Day of Unleavened Bread, it occurred to me that this is my 46th commemoration of this Feast of Unleavened Bread. Of course, the first several times that I observed them, I was too young to understand what was going on, and was probably gumming my matzo.

For the last 35 years I think I have had a fairly good idea of what this feast is all about. Many of you have been in the church of God for a long time, many longer than I have, and every time that these spring holy days come around, we walk pretty much the same ground doctrinally. We talk about the same thing every year. It never fails. And that is a good thing!

In fact it is a major reason why God has us keep these feasts each year. He does not tell us to keep them one in three years, or once in seven, or twice in ten. But, He tells us to keep them every year in their season. And, He gives us the same instruction every year. He wants us to rehearse the meanings of the holy days, and reflect on their applications to us individually, and as the church as a whole, and to the Kingdom of God and the world, too. We have all these ways that we can apply these holy days to our lives, and the lives of those we come in contact with.

Now, the repetition of these stories and lessons, along with an occasional new insight that someone might have about the days, add layers of knowledge and understanding and wisdom, so that our characters over time become saturated with them, just by means of being there. It is almost like osmosis—you absorb a lot of this.

We found this to be true with our kids. We thought that they were just sitting there on their pads on the floor, scribbling in their coloring books, not paying attention to what is going on around them. But then you ask them something, and the answer is right there. They have been listening the whole time. It has not been any kind of active attention, but they are there, and they seem to absorb it all.

That is what we can do too, but God wants us to be much more active in our understanding, our listening, and our learning more about His way of life during these feasts so that we grow, not just in the knowledge of these things, but in understanding what they are all about, and their application to our lives at any time, not just during these days, but throughout the year.

So, just about every year, we turn to Exodus 12. Please do that. We are going to do that again this year. This passage is scrunched in between two commands about the Passover.

Exodus 12:14-17 So this day shall be to you a memorial; and you shall keep it as a feast to the LORD throughout your generations. You shall keep it as a feast by an everlasting ordinance. Seven days you shall eat unleavened bread. On the first day you shall remove leaven from your houses. For whoever eats leavened bread from the first day until the seventh day, that person shall be cut off from Israel. On the first day there shall be a holy convocation, and on the seventh day there shall be a holy convocation for you. No manner of work shall be done on them; but that which everyone must eat—that only may be prepared by you. So you shall observe the Feast of Unleavened Bread, for on this same day I will have brought your armies out of the land of Egypt. Therefore you shall observe this day throughout your generations as an everlasting ordinance.

From these few verses, we learn the rudiments of this festival—the Feast of Unleavened Bread. God packs a lot into just a few verses. He tells us that it is a memorial of God leading Israel out of Egypt. We talk about that quite often during these days. He says that is a feast *to the Lord*. It is not a feast for us, necessarily. We get to enjoy it, but the feast is unto Him! That is where our focus has to be. It is part of our worship of Him.

It is to be kept perpetually in response to an everlasting ordinance. So, these things tell us that this is not something that God was going to do away with once His Son came. He emphasizes, here, that He wants this holy time to be kept perpetually, everlastingly, and always. He wants us to always be able to look back once a year to those things that were done, so that we will understand the lessons of them.

We are to eat unleavened bread for these seven days. We are not to let any leavened bread pass our lips. So, He gives it to us in the positive, as well as the negative. That way we are sure to understand that this is a time of unleavened bread only. It is not just that we eat unleavened bread at this time, but it is also that we *eat* unleavened bread, and we *do not eat* leavened bread. Understand, we cannot add any leavening in during this time. He wants us completely unleavened.

By the first day, all the leavening, He says, should have been removed from our dwellings. He does not want any part of this time to have any taint of leaven.

We are to meet twice in holy convocation during this seven day period—the first day,

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and the last day. This means that we are to be called together as a group in a church service, as we call it today, so that we can hear the instruction.

It says that we should do no customary work on these holy days (first and last), except what is required to prepare food. And even then, we know, that should probably be as little as possible because these are holy times, and God wants us to concentrate on spiritual things, and not on physical ones.

Now, as far as basic information goes, that is quite a lot from four verses, and hundreds and thousands of sermons have been preached on these various points within these four verses. And a great deal of meaning lies behind each one of these simple facts.

We ministers who speak before you go into a great deal of research and preparation to dig out little pieces of information that might add to your understanding. And, I am sure that you have heard sermon after sermon about them through the years.

But, generally, when we think of the Days of Unleavened Bread, we think of them as the Days of Unleavened Bread—because that is what God called them. That is the name that He gave to this feast, the Feast of Unleavened Bread, and we then focus on the very salient fact for this time of year, that God commands us to remove leavening, and to eat unleavened bread. That is the main thing that we take away from these days, normally.

The apostle Paul in the New Testament provides the spiritual meaning for these days. So, let us go to I Corinthians 5. We invariably come to this passage as well during the Feast of Unleavened Bread. Paul had just described the Corinthians who has some pretty bad spiritual problems. There was horrendous sexual immorality in that church, and they were just happy to let it go on—they were proud, they were puffed up in their pride. Obviously, thinking about the Days of Unleavened Bread, which were just ahead of the time that Paul was writing this, made him think of leaven, of being puffed up, as it does to bread and lumps of dough, and he gives us this meaning:

I Corinthians 5:6-7a Your glorying [your pride] is not good. Do you not know that a little leaven leavens the whole lump? Therefore purge out. . .

Purge is a very strong word. It is not just remove. It is purge! When you purge something, that is rather vigorous. So he is saying, “Get it out!”

I Corinthians 5:7a Purge out the old leaven, that you may be a new lump, since you truly are unleavened.

We are truly unleavened because of the work that Christ did. He is saying that any sin that has come in since we have been unleavened through the work of Jesus Christ, we need to get that out! That is our responsibility. He will help us, obviously, but we need to get it out! So he says,

I Corinthians 5:7b For indeed Christ, our Passover, was sacrificed for us.

That is where the work of unleavening happened. His righteousness was imputed to us. We were forgiven and we were cleaned. When we rise out of the water of baptism, we are an entirely new creation, ready to start a new life of righteousness. Well, we think we are ready. So, with God's Spirit given to us by Christ, then we can do this purging of any leaven that remains, or that creeps back in because of our habits.

I Corinthians 5:8 Therefore let us [the members of the churches of God—a proof that these days were not done away with, and surely if these days were not done away with, neither were the others, nor the Sabbath either], keep the feast, not with old leaven, nor with the leaven of malice and wickedness, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth.

His meaning is very clear. It is not ambiguous at all. He says that leaven is equated with malice and wickedness—sin of all types. We are to purge that leaven out of our lives, and become an unleavened lump of dough. We are to be unleavened just as Christ our Passover's sacrifice was truly unleavened. He really was unleavened. He was without even one sin throughout the years of His life.

He had a lot that He could have sinned over, a lot of temptations that were brought before Him by the tempter himself on many occasions. And, people tested Him time after time. The Pharisees were famous for all the times that they tempted Him. But He never gave in. He always responded well; He always responded in love, always gave some kind of teaching; He always did whatever was right in His Father's eyes; He always did what pleased God. And never once gave in to sin.

So, what we find when we put these scriptures together—Exodus 12 and I Corinthians 5—is that the Feast of Unleavened Bread portrays the work that God does in bringing us out of sin, and this sinful world—out of Egypt. But He does not just leave us after having freed us, having redeemed us. He also sets us on a wilderness journey of overcoming the sin and the world that keeps coming back so that we can walk and live in righteousness.

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So, it is not just the coming out of Egypt that God made possible, it is also the walking through the wilderness—walking out of this world till we get to the Red Sea, and we are totally free.

But, it shows an entire lifetime—not just the freeing part; not just the putting at liberty—but an entire lifetime of overcoming sin, and living righteously.

Now, one of the first things that God did once He freed Israel and set them on their journey was to reveal His law to them. It happened just a few weeks later when they arrived at Mount Sinai. We often look at Exodus 19 and 20, but then we tend to stop about three quarters of the way through chapter 20 right after the Ten Commandments. We see where God came down upon the mount, there was smoke and fire, people were afraid, and then He boomed out His Ten Commandments. What we often fail to see is that it kept right on going.

He did not reveal just His Ten Commandments, but He revealed an entire law. Immediately, right after the Ten Commandments, is what we consider to be the formal section of the Old Covenant. It goes all the way through chapter 23. So, not only did He reveal His 10 words—the Ten Commandments which are the basic understanding of His way of life—but He also revealed all of these other laws beyond that having to do with murder, stealing, slavery, and all sorts of things. And, He revealed all that right on the heels of the Ten Commandments.

He revealed not just the 10 laws, He revealed a whole body of laws immediately so that they could live not just before Him, but in community too, having something to base their decisions on in terms of how they all should get along.

So, we had a whole body of laws revealed all at once. A lot of the things He revealed they should have known already, because the Ten Commandments had been known for many hundreds of years. But, being in Egypt as they had been as captives under Egyptian law and religion, Israel had slowly forgotten those things. So God had to begin revealing them.

In Exodus 16 He reveals the Sabbath day to them, the first thing. By the time you get through chapter 20, He has revealed the core. In chapters 21-23 He is starting to fill in some of the gaps of the law, so that they had something to be governed by in a fuller way. So, He revealed all this information to them right off the bat, right as they started, so that they would have this understanding immediately, so that they would have the standard first as they took their first steps, as it were, so that they would have no excuse about the right way to live.

So, why was the revelation of God's law so important?

Please turn to Romans 3. I just want to pick out one verse, and then we will go to Romans 7. Paul is quite good at explaining the Old Testament to us; he gives us a lot of understanding about how to apply the Old Testament instruction in a New Testament context. Please notice Paul's attitude about the law—how he thinks about it.

Romans 3:20a Therefore by the deeds of the law no flesh will be justified in His sight. . .

This is an important point for us as Christians. He said that if you do the law, that will not justify you before God. So, let us just get it out of our minds that Christians are trying to be justified by works. The law is not to make us right before God. Paul tells us what the law is for:

Romans 3:20b . . . for by the law is the knowledge of sin.

The law, Paul says, is to give us an understanding of what sin is. That is the purpose of the law. It is not to justify us, not to make us proud, not to say that we are right with God, but rather to show us what sin is. (1 John 3:4)

Romans 7:7 What shall we say then? Is the law sin? Certainly not! On the contrary, I would not have known sin except through the law [the point is repeated]. For I would not have known covetousness unless the law had said, "You shall not covet."

Paul then uses an example, here, that the 10th commandment against covetousness taught him, told him, that this was an action that God did not like, that He would not do Himself. He does not covet anyone's things or persons. So, it is something that if we covet another thing, we have broken this law. It is an infraction of God's standard. God does not want us to covet and the reason is because coveting leads to bad things. It is not something that is going end well, and so He says not to do it. "This is My Standard. If you want to be ethical and moral before Me, you won't covet anything that is your neighbor's. It's his. Let him enjoy it, and be happy that he's enjoying it."

That is the way that we are supposed to approach it. Paul says that is the way that the law works. It gives us an understanding of the standard, that if we do something against the standard, we have sinned. It tells us what sin is. It defines righteousness on one side, and sin on the other side. It is very clear.

So, we have seen here, that the law's purpose is not to provide justification before God,

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and it cannot, because all men sin. So, the only way that they could be justified is by dying. That is the only way that they can pay for their own sin. Doing good does not pay for sin. It can change somebody and help him turn and repent. But doing good does not pay for anything. And, that is not the purpose.

That job of paying for sin is God's. The justification occurred through the sacrifice of Jesus Christ. It was His blood shed for us that paid the price for the sin. That is how justification occurs. When we come under that, we accept that, God then says that He accepts you, because you have accepted the Son's sacrifice.

So, that is not part of why we keep the law, or why the law is there in the first place. The law's purpose, Paul says ever so plainly, is to inform us what sin is. It is the rule book for the true game of life. It tells us how to play the game, without being penalized.

Well, I was trying to think of a good illustration from sports, or something, but I can only come up with racing things—sorry. Of course, there are ones from football, and all that, but there are rules in racing. I bet you did not know that, did you? Each track has its own particular speed limit for coming down pit road, and if you go faster than that speed limit, you are going to get a penalty. It is in the rule book. That is just what happens. If you are Talladega, and you are going 200 mph around the track, and you have to come off the track to do a green-flag pit stop, you have got to slow down that 850 horse power vehicle to 55 mph down pit road. That does not seem like all that bad, but when you had been going 200 mph, and you have to get down to 55 mph, it feels like you are creeping. It even feels like we are creeping when we come down from 65 or 70, and you must slow down to 55. Why do they have to put this sign so far from town? And then, it is 35 at Bristol—must be awful!

This is the sort of thing the law does. It provides the rules for the game. If we break those rules—transgress them in some way—a penalty automatically happens. But, we are just talking about the “why” of the law. The law is to show us what the rules are. They are the rules of how to play the game without being penalized.

I thought of one for baseball. If a pitcher has somebody on first base, he is supposed to stand there in the position, and if he makes a move any other place except toward home plate, or directly to first base, it is called a “balk.” So, if he makes a move that seems to take him off—2/3rds the way toward home plate, but then throws, instead, to first base, some umpires will call that a balk, because you made a move toward home, but you threw to first. That is a balk. The runner gets to go to second base.

So, that is a rule of that game. The pitcher broke the rules, he is penalized; now he has

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a man on second in scoring position, rather than on first where, say, if he had thrown the ball low to the hitter getting him to ground out, it could have ended in a double play. So, that is another one. It is a rule in the rulebook. You have to watch those things.

If a runner with the football in his hands steps out of bounds, well, the play is over—he is down. That is part of the rules. He is penalized; he does not get to go forward anymore. The ball is put into play for another “down” where he stepped out of bounds. Many of you know the rules of games; that is how they work.

The law is simply more important. It is the same thing, but very much more important.

The law is a guide. It is a set of boundaries that keep us within the confines of moral and ethical living. It is like a hedge. The law is there to guide us, and if we stay within those hedges, then we are fine. We are behaving morally and ethically. But if we move beyond those hedges, then we will suffer the penalty. It is always something that eventually we do not want.

While the law limits what we can do, and people do feel like it is constricting sometimes, because it is part of the law; it is there to limit our activity to what is only good. So, even though the law limits what we can do, Jesus Christ tells us that God’s commandments are based in love. He put the hedges there; He made the rules so that we can live well—with the benefits that He is willing to give us.

If we abide by the law, we show God love in that manner. When we abide by the law, we show love toward our fellow man. It is all part of staying within the hedges—God’s love is within those hedges. It is love toward Him, and love toward fellow man. But, if we go beyond that, we are outside of His love, outside of the way that is love, and we need to get back right away.

John writes in I John 5:3 (a memory scripture), “For this is the love of God that we keep His commandments. And His commandments are not burdensome.” Men think of them as confining, restricting, and burdensome; God says that they are not. And the reason that they are not burdensome is because they define the love toward God, and toward neighbor.

God gave Israel (and by extension us, spiritually) His law so that we would know what sin looks like—leavening if you will—as well as righteousness (the unleavened bread). We can see through this feast that part of its meaning to us is to get us to recognize from the law what sin is, and what righteousness is—what the leavened bread looks like, and what the unleavened bread looks like. And there you have the symbols.

Now, it is this same law that is the subject of Psalm 119. We are going to look into that a bit further now.

The psalmist, whether David or Jeremiah or some other inspired writer, has nothing but praise for God's law. Just like the apostle John, he sees no burden in God's law at all. It is all praise. It is all good. It is all from God, and therefore, what is from God is good. And, he gives 176 verses of praise for this law for various reasons.

But he shows in these 176 verses that he loves God's law because it provided him with guidance that he needed throughout life whether he was thriving or suffering. To distill it down—he has nothing but praise for God's law because it provided him with the guidance that he needed throughout his entire life no matter the situation was he happened to be in. There was something there that was relevant that he could use—instruction from God—a little bird in the ear, as it were—telling him how he should act, think, or what he should say (to be like God). It is right there in God's law.

Now, I do want to go back to one little point.

Many in the world, particularly Protestants, have accused us in the churches of God of legalism, because we do praise the law of God. A dictionary definition of "legalism" is: "A strict adherence to a literal interpretation of a law, rule, religious, or moral code." Now, that is true in a secular sense. When other people who profess to be Christians call us that, they imply that we believe that keeping the law will save us. They claim we are legalistic because they think we are trying to justify ourselves before God, and work our way to heaven (as they would put it), or work our way into the Kingdom of God.

But, the churches of God believe, and have always believed, what Paul writes in Ephesians 2:8-9, "By grace you have been saved through faith, and not of ourselves; it is a gift of God and not of works lest anyone should boast." It is very clear. We have been saved by grace, not of works. God does the saving. Our works are meaningless toward this end.

Law-keeping is a work. Its purpose in the salvation process is different than what grace does. Grace is a gift. Law-keeping is a work. Grace comes first; law-keeping comes later. Law-keeping is to teach us God's way of life to ingrain it into our character, because He has put within the covers of your Bible the instruction that we need to be like Him. So God tells us to follow it—follow His instructions. And we can only do that after He has given us grace. He has opened our mind, and He is justified us before Him, so that we can have a relationship.

He then puts within us the ability to do these things properly, and to get the right ideas and understandings—blessings—from them. And so, the law-keeping does not save us—it changes us, it molds us, it guides us, it gives us practice being like God. It keeps us within the hedges. It keeps us working in the right direction toward the image of God.

So, following God's law (to put it in a nutshell) is the practice that makes us perfect. We never actually become perfect, but we are practicing living God's way right now so that we can be more like God. So, we are practicing God's way of life even though we are flesh, and our flesh fights against it all the time. Paul does say that the flesh fights against the spirit, and the spirit fights against the flesh. It is constantly going back and forth. But, there is good in that, in that it is helping us to overcome, and put on the very character of God even now.

Turn to Romans 7. There is nothing wrong with the law. Paul said the law is holy, and the commandments holy, just, and good. So, Paul has nothing but good things to say about the law. The law is a good thing. It is a gift of God given to us for a purpose, which is to stay within God's love, and to grow in character.

Romans 7:14 For we know that the law is spiritual, but I am carnal, sold under sin.

The law is a spiritual tool that has been given to us, and we need to use it. Turn to I Corinthians 7.

I Corinthians 7:19 Circumcision is nothing, and uncircumcision is nothing, but keeping the commandments of God is what matters.

You see here, we have gone to a different congregation but his tune is the same. The commandment is holy, just, and good. The commandment is spiritual. The law is spiritual. Paul says that it is the keeping the commandments of God that matters. Circumcision or not is not part of the way of doing things anymore. That was something under the Old Covenant that identified those in that covenant. Now we have a different thing that identifies us. But, whether a man is circumcised or not, regarding the New Covenant, is not really relevant.

What is relevant is keeping God's commandments.

Those under the Old Covenant and those under the New Covenant are both supposed to keep the same commandments. The commandments did not change when the covenant changed. When the old became obsolete, and the new was brought in, the commandments just kept right on going through.

So whether circumcised or not, whether part of the Old Covenant or the New Covenant, it is keeping the commandments that matters, because that keeps us within the boundaries. We have to play by the rules that God has set down.

Let us go back to the words of our Savior, because it is always good to touch base with Him. Turn to Matthew 5, and we will read from that famous section found in verses 17-20. See the level that He puts the law on, and how He shows and summarizes all that we have shown you so far today. This tells you all that you need to know.

Matthew 5:17 "Do not think that I came to destroy the Law or the Prophets (the entire Old Testament). I did not come to destroy but to fulfill [fill to the full].

He was giving us the greater understanding of it, because before this time, people did not really understand it. It took the coming of Jesus Christ and the teachings/explanations that He gave, and the examples that He gave and lived to make the law truly magnified, so that we can see it as God sees it.

Matthew 5:18 "For assuredly, I say to you, till heaven and earth pass away [has this happened yet?], one jot or one tittle will by no means pass from the law till all is fulfilled.

So, it is still working.

Matthew 5:19 "Whoever therefore breaks one of the least of these commandments, and teaches men so, shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but whoever does and teaches them, he shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven.

So, what does Paul say? It is the keeping the commandments that matters.

Do not you want to be great in the Kingdom of God? Do not you want to be one of Christ's right hand men or women? Do not you want to have position in God's government? Do not you want to be trusted by God? Well, do, and teach them so.

Matthew 5:20 "For I say to you, that unless your righteousness exceeds the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven.

They were sticklers for the law, were they not? They had a wrong approach to it, but they were known far and wide for loving the law, and doing whatever they could to obey it. And, our God and King says, "You have to outstrip those guys as far as law-keeping

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goes.” So, He gives us a way to gauge how well we are doing. Of course, we can do that through the Spirit of God; we understand the spirit of the law, not just the letter.

Okay, let us get into Psalm 119 now. However, I am not going to go to the first part just yet. Please turn to verse 97. This is just a bit over halfway through. As we go through, I want you to notice the feeling of the psalmist for God’s law:

Psalm 119:97-106 Oh, how I love Your law! It is my meditation all the day. You, through Your commandments, make me wiser than my enemies; for they [the commandments] are ever with me. I have more understanding than all my teachers, for Your testimonies are my meditation. I understand more than the ancients, because I keep Your precepts. I have restrained my feet from every evil way, that I may keep Your word. I have not departed from Your judgments, for You Yourself have taught me. How sweet are Your words to my taste, sweeter than honey to my mouth! Through Your precepts I get understanding; therefore I hate every false way. Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path. I have sworn and confirmed that I will keep Your righteous judgments.

So we can see, here, that the psalmist declares not only his love for the law of God, but also why He feels that way so deeply, and he thinks about it all the time. God’s law, he says, makes him wiser than his enemies.

Wisdom is proper doing. It is not necessarily between your ears, it is the decisions you make. It is the things that you do so that you do what is right and good—proper doing, right conduct, shrewd decision making. He is saying that keeping God’s law keeps us a step ahead of the rest of the world, our enemies, and whoever else is not keeping God’s law. If we can tap into God’s law and know the right way to act, know what decisions to make because God has instructed us in that way, then we will soon be putting our enemies in the dust, because we have God’s advice on matters.

When we know God’s law, we understand what is going on—we can see a bigger picture, we know why things are happening—because we know that God is manipulating events for our benefit. He wants us to overcome and grow, and He is putting us through various tests and trials to help build the character in us so that we are more like His Son. So, we can take a step back from our problems—we should—and be able to say, “Aha! I’ve been through this before! God is trying to get my attention. God wants me to do this—and oh it is very hard to do this—but I need to do it.” He has told us, He has given us a promise in I Corinthians 10 that He has given us nothing that is too hard for us. There is a way of escape. God’s way of escape is the best way. What does the law say about this?

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And so, our enemies—our stumbling blocks, our obstacles, our tests and trials—can be overcome, because we have what it takes from God's law inculcated in our minds to make those wise decisions to overcome them. It also says, here, that it gives us understanding, which is all a part of this. We know it, and we have come to understand it over the years, and when we do it, we understand it even better, because we see how things work out.

So, the law gives a lot of benefits.

The writer says that the law teaches him to restrain himself from falling into evil. If he knows from God's law that a certain thing is outside the bounds of the hedges, well then, if he just does what God's law says, and does not do that thing, then he keeps his feet from evil; he keeps himself from falling into the pit; he keeps himself from having problems.

Now, this does not always occur. We are human. We mess up. We do not get things right. But, if we know God's law, and we are doing our best to honor God by keeping them, then the chances of us having lots of problems diminishes, because we are able to avoid them. God's law helps us to keep our feet from evil.

He says in verse 105 that it lights the path before us. So, we can avoid the false way; the path that goes off in the wrong direction. We can avoid foolish entanglements with people and situations that are going to take us away from God, rather than toward the Kingdom of God. The law is beneficial in so many ways.

So, what we can do in taking these ten verses is to boil the instructions down into two points: 1) God's law instructs our minds, and 2) God's law constrains our conduct. So, it works both mentally and physically; what we say, and what we do. We can say that God's law illuminates our understanding, and it also illuminates our walk. In other words, it is our teacher, and our guide.

This is an Old Testament type of Christ, because is He not also our Teacher and Guide? He is our Leader; our Archegos who goes before, and shows us the way. The Old Testament is a kind of type of Jesus Christ. It is God's way—God's mind—in law. We can look at it that way. If we know Jesus Christ, if we know what He teaches, and we know what He would do, then it would behave the same way toward us as the law does. It would keep us from evil, teach us wisdom, and all these other things mentioned in the past few minutes.

We can notice a few other points here about keeping God's law. The psalmist mentions

a couple of times that he meditates on God's law "all the day." Another time he says, "God's laws are ever with him." This implies that they are to be a constant presence with us. They are to be on our mind all the time. It is not something that we can put on the shelf for occasional use, and we get it down only when we think we need some advice. God's law is to be internalized, and to be used constantly. That is the only way that God's character is going to be ingrained in us. We cannot just use it in special situations. It cannot be just a Sabbath thing. It must be all the time—every situation. We have to always have it ready to be deployed in whatever situation.

As I opened up this sermon, I talked about how God puts us through these repetitions every year so that we get to know, every year—re-trained, re-honed on these subjects time after time after time. He wants us to do the same with His law. He wants us to keep it top of mind, front of mind, all the time.

What would Jesus do? What does the law say (on this particular point)?

And, if we are studying God's Word, we are paying attention to the things that we are being taught, then these things should be right on the tip of our tongue all the time. Not that we need to say them all the time, but they need to be there so we can make use of them.

He also says, here, that we should not depart from them—why would we want to? He says that they are taught to us by God Himself. They are sweet to our taste. He means that their effects and outcomes are always good and beneficial.

We may take our lumps for some reason for keeping God's law. Many people have keeping the Sabbath problems in terms of their employment. And, we think of it as a bad thing. "Oh, I'm going through this great trial! I'm being tested on the Sabbath." But, we have the promise that if we keep God's law, "Remember the Sabbath to keep it holy (do not do any work on it)," if we honor that law, then at a certain time, we do not know when, we are going to learn the benefit of that. And there are things going on in the meantime that are good for us. God honors us. God honors the decision when we decide in favor of Him and His law. So, it is going to be a benefit even though maybe right now it does not feel very good. But, in time we are going to see the good outcome.

Now, I am sure that as we were going through these 10 verses, that you noticed that the psalmist does not always use the term God's law. He does not say that God's law does this, God's law does that, God's law does this other thing, I love God's law. . . God's law. . . God's law. . . God's law. He does not do that. I think that would be rather boring and monotonous. It would also be very limiting, because just the single term "God's law"

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does not encompass all of what the psalmist meant here. We would be limiting our praise and all of our understanding in just one part of God's revelation.

In these ten verses we went through six different words that are approximate synonyms for law. These same six, and a couple more, occur throughout Psalm 119. In fact, I am going to give you 11 of them—one section of eight, and then one section of three.

Please turn back to the first stanza, Aleph, verses 1-8. Here is a good place to define these terms, because in these 8 verses are 8 of these Hebrew words. Then in verse 9 is another one. So, right here at the beginning of the psalm, the psalmist is laying these out so that we can understand that these are the things that he is going to be speaking about throughout the whole of the psalm.

So, here in the first stanza, we have most of the words that the psalmist is going to use to describe what God teaches us—what God is revealing to us. As I said, 8 of them occur in the first 8 verses, and they are pretty much the core—the most used—throughout Psalm 119.

These same 8 words are also found through the section of verses of 33-40, and also 41-48, and 57-64, 73-80, 81-88, 129-136—they just keep being repeated in all these various stanzas.

Psalm 119:1-8 Blessed are the undefiled in *the way*, who walk in *the law* of the LORD! Blessed are those who keep His *testimonies*, who seek Him with the whole heart! They also do no iniquity; they walk in His *ways*. You have commanded us to keep Your *precepts* diligently. Oh, that my *ways* were directed to keep Your *statutes*! Then I would not be ashamed, when I look into all Your *commandments*. I will praise You with uprightness of heart, when I learn Your *righteous judgments*. I will keep Your *statutes*; oh, do not forsake me utterly!

Psalm 119:9 How can a young man cleanse his way? By taking heed according to Your *word*.

And there is a different word used in verse 11, though it is translated into English also as “word.”

Psalm 119:11 Your *word* I have hidden in my heart, that I might not sin against You!

WAY

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“Blessed *are* the undefiled in ***the way***,” which is the Hebrew word, “derek.” This word indicates a “well travelled path.” It is a way. It is used five times in the plural, six times in the singular. What this describes is the pattern of life that God’s revelation marks out for us. God’s revelation opens up, produces, illuminates a path—a way. It should be well travelled. Please turn to Genesis 18. This is when God is asking Himself whether He should let Abraham in on what He is going to do to Sodom. And He says,

Genesis 18:19 For I have known him, in order that he may command his children and his household after him, that they keep the way of the LORD, to do righteousness and justice, that the LORD may bring to Abraham what He has spoken to him.

So we see that “derek” is defined as God’s way—the Lord’s way—which is to do righteousness and justice. It is the way—the pattern of life—that God had revealed to Abraham, which he had followed. He had walked that path.

LAW

Law, here is, “torah.” This occurs—you would think that it would occur more in Psalm 119—only 25 times out of 176 verses. It denotes direction and instruction, meaning “I will direct you in the way that you should go.” Or, “I will instruct you in what is right.” More often in the Bible as a whole, this word refers to a body of teaching; not necessarily one particular law, but whole group of laws. For example, you have the law that is shown in Deuteronomy. It was a synopsis of the law that been given in the other four books.

Or you have the book of Leviticus where you have a whole bunch of laws on various subjects, such as the “Holiness Code,” which is only one section of the law.

In Psalm 119, torah denotes “law” in its widest possible sense—the big, over-arching term. It is, as a blank statement, all of God’s instruction—everything. So, we do not want to confine it to just the Ten Commandments, or just the Pentateuch, or just what is in the Old Testament, but it is actually everything that God has revealed—all of His instructions from cover to cover.

There is another thing we should understand here. The instruction that we are talking about, this broad body of instruction, refers not necessarily to an abstract concept of law, but how one should live. It is not necessarily focusing in on how the law is put together, or what the words of the law are, but rather how we do it, live it, and apply it.

Another little point here is that this word cannot cut from God’s personal involvement.

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This is not just any kind of instruction, but this is **God's instruction**. God personally gave this to us. So, obviously, now that God is involved in this word, and it means the totality of His instruction, and it focuses not on the abstract concepts, but on the application and how we actually fulfill it, then that really gives us an idea of what is going on here. It is something that God wants each one of us to take to heart personally to please Him.

Turn to Deuteronomy 4. Notice the personal touch here:

Deuteronomy 4:5-8 "Surely I [Moses] have taught you [God's] statutes and judgments, just as the LORD my God commanded me, that you should act according to them in the land which you go to possess. Therefore be careful to observe them; for this is your wisdom and your understanding in the sight of the peoples who will hear all these statutes, and say, 'Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people.' For what great nation is there that has God so near to it, as the LORD our God is to us, for whatever reason we may call upon Him? And what great nation is there that has such statutes and righteous judgments as are in all this law which I set before you this day?"

So, he is telling us in these few verses that God not only gave us this law Himself, He gave us the best law that ever was! And just to us [physical and spiritual Israel]. He is saying that this should make you honor it and respect it all the more.

TESTIMONIES

This is the Hebrew word "edah," or plural "eduht." It occurs 22 times in the plural, and once in the singular. It is a solemn attestation—a declaration—of the will of God. And, I think this is neat, it implies the expert opinion of One who really knows. So, testimonies are commands that are themselves witnesses to God's character, demonstrating His will. Testimonies are generally ordinances that reveal God's standard of conduct.

In Exodus 31:18 it says, "Then He [God] made an end of speaking with him [Moses] on Mount Sinai. He gave Moses two tablets of the testimony, tablets of stone written with the Finger of God." This is interesting because He is talking about the Ten Commandments. They were called "the testimony." It is interesting when you plug these definitions back in. The Ten Commandments, under this definition of testimony, means that they are the expert opinion of the One who really knows; a solemn attestation and declaration of the will of God. It is almost as if He is swearing—testifying—that, "This is the right way to go. And, I should know," because He is the most Expert Witness of all.

This is the image of testifying under oath; giving testimony when being called as a witness in a court of law; you are supposed to be giving an account—an attestation, a

declaration—of what really is, what really happened. You are supposed to be an expert in that particular area of expertise. And so, this is God’s expert testimony that this is the way to go—this is the way to live.

PRECEPTS

This is another interesting one. It occurs 21 times in Psalm 119. It is “piqqudim.” It comes from a root word that means, “to take notice of something; to take care of something; or, to tend to something.” It is a poetic word for injunctions, or mandates. Believe it or not, this word within the whole Old Testament is found only in the Psalms. That is why they claim it is a poetic word. What is most interesting about this is that precepts are the responsibilities that God lays upon His people—their duties. If He gives you a precept, then it is something that you need to do. You are responsible for fulfilling it.

In Psalm 111:7 this word is also used, “The works of His hands are verity, truth, and justice. All His precepts are sure.” This gives us the understanding that when God gives us a responsibility to do, it is sure—meaning, we can be assured that it is a good thing for us to do; it is wise; it is godly.

STATUTES

This is the Hebrew word, “chuqqim, or khuqqim.” It occurs 21 times, and it always occurs in the plural in the Psalms; it literally means, “things inscribed,” as if it had been inscribed into stone. What this indicates is that it is permanent, and has great substance. Back in these Old Testament days, they did not inscribe things into stone; we do not even do it either. We do not inscribe things into stone unless they are important to us. So, statutes are things that have this weight to them.

It refers to enacted laws; often found in modern translations as “decrees.” It is often used throughout the Old Testament as part of a series, such as, “My commandments, statutes, and judgments.” Those things are to sum up all of God’s commands—statutes, judgments, commandments.

But in particular, in the Bible statutes almost always refer to a law of a particular festival, or ritual. So, statutes often have to do with the laws of the feasts—Passover, Days of Unleavened Bread, Pentecost, the Feast of Trumpets, the Day of Atonement, the Feast of Tabernacles, the Last Great Day; or the law of the sacrifices (like those found in Leviticus chapters 1-5); or the laws of the priesthood—these are statutes that were given, inscribed—to Israel on a particular body of the law. They were always either

festivals or rituals.

COMMANDMENTS

This also occurs 21 times in the plural. Many of the modern translations use the word, “commands.” It is also found once in the singular. It signifies a definitive or a definite authoritative command spelling out one’s duty under a covenant. That is the difference here. It is one’s duty under a covenant. And, the keeping of it, because the covenant is made with God, is one’s personal response to God.

So commands spell out one’s duty under a covenant. It is personal toward God because He is the One we have made the covenant with. They show us how we must live to remain in harmony with the Holy One.

RIGHTEOUS, RIGHTEOUSNESS

In Psalm 119:7 you find the word “righteous,” a better word would be “righteousness,” because in the Hebrew this would be worded, “When I learn your judgments of righteousness.” This is the Hebrew word, “psadaq,” with the underlying idea of “conforming to a norm.” A person is righteous when his behavior accords with an established moral and ethical standard. So, here the emphasis is on conformity, not on sinlessness (believe it or not); conformity—you are doing what God wants you to do.

It is closely related to “justice,” and “giving people, or God, their due.” This one, then, is mostly about how to treat God or His people as He expects us to treat Him, or them.

JUDGMENT

This is the Hebrew word “mishpat, or mispot.” It occurs 19 times in the plural, and 4 times in the singular. This word is the most government oriented one of all the words. This word expresses the idea and existence of government; not just judicial government, but also executive and legislative government. So, it represents a judicial decision that constitutes a president, which is then enacted or legislated as a law, and then backed by the power of the executive. As you can see, it implies government at every point.

In the Pentateuch, this refers to the laws that were given after the Ten Commandments. In Psalm 119, it essentially means, “rules for living.”

WORD

This is the Hebrew word “dabar,” which occurs 24 times, and it is the general term for God’s revelation. When we hold up the Bible, and claim that this is God’s Word, that is also what it means in Psalm 119.

TRUTH

You would think that this would be all throughout Psalm 119, but it is found only a couple of times. This implies being both true and faithful. Since it comes from God, He is infallible, so we can believe Him, and trust Him in everything. So, whatever is true, is reliable, and can be counted on, because it is trustworthy.

SAYING

This is the Hebrew word, “imrah,” which occurs 19 times. It means, “utterance or speech.” It often has the connotation of “a promise.” When God speaks, He is making a promise.

I wanted to do these eleven words and give them to you so that you would have them in your arsenal to study out on your own. They are given to us in such numbers so that we are insured that we understand that what the psalmist is talking about is not just one particular part of God’s law, but it is all of it—it is all of His revelation, it is the whole thing—all that God has revealed to us.

It is all good. It is all helpful.

However, the thing that is stressed in Psalm 119 is living by God’s Word. That is the thing.

The blessedness that the first verse speaks of is for those who walk according to the law of God—those who keep His statutes. It is about the doing, not necessarily the knowing.

So, from the very beginning, at the very first verse, we are to understand that the keeping of God’s law is a practical matter. It is a way of life, not merely a course of academic study so that we know all the laws, but rather it is the doing. So, truly knowing the law is to be experiencing and using it in the many situations of life.

As we can see from the length of Psalm 119 there are hundreds of things that we can say in praise of God’s law. It is a priceless tool that God has put at our disposal. We

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need to make sure that we know it, and that we live by it, so that we can grow in the character of God.