

PSALM 119.113-120

psalm
God's Word 119

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A Scriptorium Study from The Fellowship of Ailbe

Psalm 119.113-120

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Introduction to Psalm 119.113-120

More than any previous stanza, the *samek* verses seem to be aware of the presence of wickedness and its strong allure.

The “double-minded” and “evildoers” are always near (vv. 113, 115). So also those “who stray” from the Lord and practice deceit with their tongues (v. 118). The wicked are as dross (v. 119) to be cast away as worthless.

If we shelter in God and His Word (v. 114), we will find a shield to protect us against temptations and threats. Obeying the commandments of God, and all His Word, will keep us from straying (vv. 115, 118) and allow us to know His upholding grace and truth for all things (v. 117).

So, too, will remembering the promise of God that He will discipline His people when they turn away from Him (v. 120).

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We hope you find this study of Psalm 119 instructive and helpful to equip you for your walk with and work for the Lord. Thank you for joining us.

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1 No Contradiction

Pray Psalm 119.113.

I hate the double-minded,
But I love Your law.

Sing Psalm 119.113-115.

(Aurelia: *The Church's One Foundation*)

Lord, those who do not trust You with all their mind and heart,
shall soon receive their just due - let them from me depart!
My shelter and my shield, Lord, I hope in all Your Word!
To all Your Law I yield, Lord, to live in full accord.

Read Psalm 119.113-120; meditate on verse 113.

Preparation

1. Whom did the psalmist hate?
2. How did he feel about God's Law?

Meditation

The psalmist reminds us again that there is no contradiction between hate and love when they are each properly focused. We must hate that which compromises the Word and ways of God; and we must love His Law and Word with all our heart. Exercised thusly, hate and love are two sides of the same coin.

Still, "hate" seems like a dangerous affection to keep in our heart. And, indeed, it is. We must be careful in how we use it. The focus of hate must always be evil and sin (cf. Ps. 97.10). Those who practice evil fall away from the Lord's pathway (Ps. 101.3). Thus, we rightly "hate every false way" (Ps. 119.104) and those who promote them (v. 113; cf. Ps. 139.21, 22).

But we hate those who fall away even as we love them and appeal to them to forsake their wicked ways and receive the grace of salvation through Jesus Christ. That is, our hate is always tempered and constrained by love, just as God's is (cf. Matt. 5.43-48). We should pray for the lost and for all those who espouse wickedness and evil, who practice deceit and spread lies, and who are causing many to fall into the snares of sin. We hate them for that, and we hate the evil they promote. But we love them enough to pray for them and to serve them as we can, that God might break through their hard souls and give them a new heart in Jesus (Gal. 4.6).

Just as He did with us.

Treasures Old and New: Matthew 13.52; Psalm 119.162

The psalmist hated double mindedness in others, but he also hated it in himself. We can see that he quickly reminded himself that he loved God's Law.

In Psalm 112.7, 8 we read that a good man's "heart is steadfast, trusting in the LORD", and his "heart is established." The attributes of *steadfastness* and being *established* exemplify singleness of mind—totally focused on God.

Being on the fence about our determination to follow God's Law is anathema to us and to the Lord. Jesus said to the church in Laodicea: "I know your works, that you are neither cold nor hot. I could wish you were cold or hot. So then, because you are lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will vomit you out of My mouth"

(Rev. 3.15, 16). His thoughts are straightforward and clear on the subject.

In the Merriam-Webster dictionary, after the definition for double-minded—waving in mind, undecided, vacillating—James 1.8 is given as an example of its use in a sentence: “he is a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways.” And indeed, that is what this hated mindset gets us: instability in everything.

Instability breeds insincerity and hypocrisy. And who wants that in their life? Nobody should.

So what will keep us from this fate? A sure, pure, and indefatigable love for God’s Law:
“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” (Ps. 119.1-3). Steadfast and established.

Straightforward. Single-minded. Ready. Set. Forever. To the very end.

For reflection

1. What are some things that can make us “double-minded”? Why is this not a good mindset to adopt?
2. Loving God’s Law is the way to overcome double mindedness. But what should loving God’s Law look like in your life?
3. How will you be able to recognize double mindedness when it begins to tempt you?

Here is a dread of the risings of sin, and the first beginnings of it. The more we love the law of God, the more watchful we shall be, lest vain thoughts draw us from what we love. Matthew Henry (1662-1714), *Commentary on Psalm 119.113*

Pray Psalm 119.116, 117.

Preview your day in prayer, asking the Lord to help you hate evil and love His Word, and to uphold you and keep you safe in all your ways.

Sing Psalm 119.116, 117.

(Aurelia: *The Church’s One Foundation*)

Uphold me by Your Word, Lord, and keep me from all shame.

Let me live ever forward to glorify Your Name.

Lord, hold me up! Sustain me in all Your holy way.

To keep Your statutes train me, and help me to obey.

2 Seeking. Go Hide.

Pray Psalm 119.114.

You *are* my hiding place and my shield;
I hope in Your word.

Sing Psalm 119.113-115.

(Aurelia: *The Church's One Foundation*)

Lord, those who do not trust You with all their mind and heart,
shall soon receive their just due – let them from me depart!
My shelter and my shield, Lord, I hope in all Your Word!
To all Your Law I yield, Lord, to live in full accord.

Read Psalm 119.113-120; meditate on verse 114.

Preparation

1. What was God to the psalmist?
2. How did he regard God's Word?

Meditation

“Ready or not, here I come!” Remember how, hearing that call, you'd get a little shiver of excitement up your back, and hope that you'd concealed yourself sufficiently? And that you'd still be hidden when, exasperated by your stealth, they'd cry out, “All, all in free!”?

Now we don't hear “Ready or not, here I come!” because our adversary, the devil, stalks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour (1 Pet. 5.8). C. S. Lewis wrote that the devil wants nothing so much as to devour us, to consume us, so that we become completely one with him while, at the same time, maintaining our distinct identity.

He's seeking you every moment. Better know where to go hide. Our psalmist knew: Hide in the Lord and let Him shield you from all harm. Hope in His Word and not in the alluring, tempting, self-serving suggestions of the devil. This verse is one of several (cf. Ps. 12.5-7; Eph. 6.16) that inspired Celtic Christian poets to compose *lorica* or “breastplate” poems. “Patrick's Breastplate” is the best-known of these, and, while not actually by Patrick, it certainly captures his idea of what it means to shelter in the Lord and hope in His Word:

Christ be with me, Christ within me,
Christ behind me, Christ before me,
Christ beside me, Christ to win me,
Christ to comfort and restore me.
Christ beneath me, Christ above me,
Christ in quiet, Christ in danger,
Christ in the heart of all that love me,
Christ in the mouth of friend or stranger.
(arr. C. F. Alexander)

Hide there, and cling to His Word, and you'll be safe from the one who seeks to devour your soul.

Treasures Old and New: Matthew 13.52; Psalm 119.162

There are many things to be afraid of. First and foremost, would be our enemy. “We do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age,

against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places” (Eph. 6.12). Scary but true, this darkness can be living inside flesh and blood, and we can be hounded by them, too. As Dorothy in the *Wizard of Oz* opined, “Lions and tigers and bears, oh my!” And I would add, “Scary and angry people too, oh my!” We also fear disease, poverty, pain, suffering, broken relationships, and a zillion other things.

But God. Our God. He is our hiding place. We can dwell in the secret place of the Most High and abide under the shadow of the Almighty. And He and His truth are our shield. We will not be afraid of the terror by night, nor of the arrows that fly by day, nor of the pestilence that walks in darkness, nor of the destruction that lays waste at noonday (Ps. 91.1, 4-6).

All our hope. All our confidence. All our trust is put in His Word. And what a loving Word that is! “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God” (Jn. 1.1).

“I cried out to You, O LORD: I said, ‘You are my refuge, my portion in the land of the living’” (Ps. 142.5).

“You are my hiding place; You shall preserve me from trouble; You shall surround me with songs of deliverance” (Ps. 32.7).

“Whenever I am afraid, I will trust in You. In God (I will praise His word), in the LORD (I will praise His word), in God I have put my trust; I will not be afraid. What can man do to me?” (Ps. 56.3, 11, 12).

There is no shame in seeking refuge with God. He cares about us. Peter recommended that we cast all our cares upon Him “for He cares for you” (1 Pet. 5.7). He knows. He has promised to shelter us, when we put our full hope and trust in Him and His Word (Ps. 119.114). We cannot just conjure this courageous feeling, though; we must work hard to seek Him in His Word and lean into Him to remedy all our needs and fears. “I, even I, am He who comforts you. Who are you that you should be afraid of man who will die, and of the son of a man who will be made like grass?” (Is. 51.12)

Our Protector and Comforter wants us to remember this: “The eternal God is your refuge, and underneath are the everlasting arms...” (Deut. 33.27). Go hope and hide in Him.

For reflection

1. When do you most feel like you need to shelter in the Lord and under His shield?
2. Why is it important to bear in mind that “your adversary” is seeking to devour you? How can you prepare for this each day?
3. How can believers strengthen one another against the fears and uncertainties of our lives?

The believer could not live without the grace of God; but, supported by his hand, his spiritual life shall be maintained. Our holy security is grounded on Divine supports. Matthew Henry (1662-1714), *Commentary on Psalm 119.114*

Pray Psalm 119.116, 117.

Set your day before the Lord in prayer and ask Him to uphold you in all your doings, so that you keep His Word and know His Presence with you.

Sing Psalm 119.116, 117.

(Aurelia: *The Church's One Foundation*)

Uphold me by Your Word, Lord, and keep me from all shame.

Let me live ever forward to glorify Your Name.

Lord, hold me up! Sustain me in all Your holy way.

To keep Your statutes train me, and help me to obey.

3 Speaking to Our Traps

Pray Psalm 119.115.

Depart from me, you evildoers,
For I will keep the commandments of my God!

Sing Psalm 119.113-115.

(Aurelia: *The Church's One Foundation*)

Lord, those who do not trust You with all their mind and heart,
shall soon receive their just due – let them from me depart!
My shelter and my shield, Lord, I hope in all Your Word!
To all Your Law I yield, Lord, to live in full accord.

Read Psalm 119.113-120; meditate on verse 115.

Preparation

1. To whom did the psalmist speak, and what did he say to them?
2. What did he commit to doing?

Meditation

Do you notice anything different about this verse? Exactly! It's not a prayer. It's more like an aside. I don't think the psalmist was actually in the presence of wicked people when he blurted this out. And I don't think he stopped his prayer to utter this command. Perhaps he was thinking about the day ahead, and nailing down the mindset and heartset that he would need to fulfill his vows to the Lord.

But by speaking *as if* the wicked were in his presence, and declaring that he wanted nothing to do with them, he was setting a direction for any choices he might have to face when wicked people actually were before him, scorning or seeking to entice him away from the Lord.

But such a firm declaration is not enough to make sure we won't give in and be corrupted by some of the people we rub shoulders with during a day (1 Cor. 15.33). We need to keep company with those who fear the Lord (Ps. 119.63), and cling to His commandments, to keep them in all our ways.

Is there a lesson here about prayer? As we pray for the day ahead, we might be able to see where traps or snares leading to sin might lie. Or where we'll need extra grace from the Lord. Or someone from whom we might need to seek forgiveness. Speaking directly to the situation or person, in the Presence of God in prayer, might be a useful way to make sure, when the moment arrives, you have the mind of Christ and the heart of God's Spirit to do whatever God is leading you to do.

Treasures Old and New: Matthew 13.52; Psalm 119.162

“Therefore you shall keep My commandments, and perform them: I AM the LORD” (Lev. 22.31).

Those are words that you cannot misunderstand. They are not nuanced, and they are not told slant.

The psalmist believed those words wholeheartedly and set about to clear the decks of his life of everything that would be displeasing to God. He went about it in two ways:

1. He restrained his own feet from every evil way (Ps. 119.101).
2. He informed all the evildoers to leave him alone. “Scram. Depart. Get away from me.” (Ps. 119.115)

He covered all his bases for two more reasons:

1. I'm going to keep God's word. (vs. 101)

2. I'm going to keep the commandments of my God! (vs. 115)

Jesus took the same straightforward approach against evil: “Get behind Me, Satan! For it is written, ‘You shall worship the LORD your God, and Him only you shall serve’” (Lk. 4.8).

Jesus also had some unnuanced words for the unfaithful: “And then I will declare to them, ‘I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness!’” (Matt. 7.23)

We are practicing lawlessness any time we are entertaining evil—either mentally or physically. Contrary to popular opinion, practice doesn't make perfect, it merely makes permanent.

There is an antidote to practicing lawlessness. James prescribed it: “Therefore submit to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you.” And as a lagniappe, he also added a cure for the hated condition of being double-minded: “Draw near to God and He will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners; and purify your hearts, you double-minded” (Jms. 4.7, 8).

David reminded us to, “Depart from evil, and do good...” (Ps. 37.27), and Peter reiterated the same thing when he wrote, “He who would love life...let him turn away from evil and do good; let him seek peace and pursue it” (1 Pet. 3.10, 11). And then Paul added his take on the topic of departing from evil. He had already written about the dangers of the love of money, and then he wrote about how to gain the victory over evil: “But you, O man of God, flee these things and pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, patience, gentleness. Fight the good fight of faith, lay hold on eternal life, to which you were also called and have confessed the good confession in the presence of many witnesses. I urge you...keep this commandment without spot, blameless...” (1 Tim. 6.10-14).

With the power of the Holy Spirit, we will restrain ourselves from every evil way; and evildoers in our path will be told to “Depart”! Because who doesn't want freedom from this trap?

We are impelled to do this because we long to keep God's Word and His commandments. Because we love Him and want Him to know it.

Forever, to the very end.

For reflection

1. What evil or affliction will you bark at today and tell it to just “Go away!”?
2. Why is keeping God's commandments the perfect antidote to sin and sinful tendencies?
3. Whom will you encourage in keeping the Word of God today?

As he saw how great a hindrance the ungodly are to us, he banishes them to a distance from him; or rather, he testifies that he will beware of entangling himself in their society. Nor has he said this so much for his own sake as to teach us by his example, that if we would hold on in the way of the Lord without stumbling, we must endeavor, above all things, to keep at the greatest possible distance from worldly and wicked men, not in regard to distance of place, but in respect of intercourse and conversation. John Calvin (1509-1564), Commentary on Psalm 119.115

Pray Psalm 119.118, 119.

Pray that God will protect you against wicked temptations and disobedient ways, and that, throughout this day, He will enable you to cling to His Word.

Sing Psalm 119.118, 119.

(Aurelia: *The Church's One Foundation*)

All those who from Your path stray, reject and bring to shame.
They mock Your chosen pathway, and scorn Your holy Name.
Like dross cast them away, Lord - the wicked of the earth!
Your Word will I obey, Lord, and praise Your holy worth.

4 God Who Upholds

Pray Psalm 119.116, 117.

Uphold me according to Your word, that I may live;
And do not let me be ashamed of my hope.
Hold me up, and I shall be safe,
And I shall observe Your statutes continually.

Sing Psalm 119.116, 117.

(Aurelia: *The Church's One Foundation*)

Uphold me by Your Word, Lord, and keep me from all shame.
Let me live ever forward to glorify Your Name.
Lord, hold me up! Sustain me in all Your holy way.
To keep Your statutes train me, and help me to obey.

Read Psalm 119.113-120; meditate on verses 116, 117.

Preparation

1. What did the psalmist want God to do?
2. To what did he commit himself?

Meditation

Here is another fine example of Hebrew poetry set up as a parallelism. Can you see how it works? Take a minute and look for things that go together or imply one another. Soon you'll notice the parallel takes this complementary form:

- A "Uphold me..."
- B "...that I may live..."
- C "...let me not be ashamed"
- A "Hold me up..."
- B "I shall be safe..."
- C "I shall observe Your statutes..."

It's not hard to discern the primary message: We need God to lift us above our trials and afflictions into true and eternal life, where we are safe and unashamed in the counsel of His Word. We hear people talk about wanting to live "above the fray", to "get on top of things", or "rise to the challenge..." Can you see how all such talk reflects this basic understanding of the soul about our need for the Lord?

Above the fray, on top of things, and surmounting every challenge are possible by clinging to the Law and Word of God and seeking His upholding grace in prayer. This is how we demonstrate our trust in Him, as well as how we grow through our trials, know peace and safety, and dwell in happiness in the shelter of the Lord. And this, in a nutshell, is the basic message of Psalm 119.

These poems were meant for repeated meditation, recitation, and singing. They are still valuable for such purposes today. Set aside some time today to meditate on, pray, and sing just these two verses. And let the Lord lift you to Himself above all the trials, challenges, and troubles of your day.

Treasures Old and New: Matthew 13.52; Psalm 119.162

At our house, Christmas decorations do not come out until the day after Thanksgiving. But fall decorations can appear whenever the sun begins to slant differently through the leaves and the temperatures dip below 80. It is very subjective. Thus, not too long ago our seven-year-old grandson Ralph was sounding out a little

decoration that consisted of one word. He is a very good reader but was having some difficulty with this one. He asked, "Is that pumpkin an O?" When answered in the affirmative, the lights came on. Welcome! But there is a big difference between Welc me and Welcome. The pumpkin was obfuscating the obvious.

So often our thoughts are like that. We feel confused about something in the Word of God; we might even feel embarrassed or ashamed. We take a wrong turn somewhere because we can't "sound out" how the Word applies to our lives, moment by moment. We have a big pumpkin obscuring our sight.

I think the psalmist was experiencing that, too.

"Uphold me." "Hold me up." Those are cries for help. "Let me live." "Don't let me be ashamed!" "Keep me safe!" Because, most of all, he wanted to observe God's statutes continually. (Ps. 119.116, 117)

David prayed something similar: "Uphold my steps in Your paths, that my footsteps may not slip" (Ps. 17.5).

And that should be our response as well. "He who trusts in his own heart is a fool, but whoever walks wisely will be delivered" (Prov. 28.26). God tells us, "Fear not, for I am with you; be not dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you, yes, I will help you, I will uphold you with My righteous right hand" (Is. 41.10).

How do we know when we're seeing the Word properly and trusting God to uphold and hold us up? When we are certain about what we believe and determined to believe it continually: "For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes..." (Rom. 1.16). "...I am not ashamed, for I know whom I have believed and am persuaded that He is able..." (2 Tim. 1.12). And then the final pumpkin-buster? "...Christ in you, the hope of glory" (Col. 1.27).

When we truly know and believe God, we can see Him in His Word. We believe that He upholds us and holds us up. The pumpkins that we all occasionally see that block and bewilder us, will be more readily discernable for what they are. And we will daily read more clearly God's *Welcome* to us into His glorious Kingdom work.

For reflection

1. What would make you "ashamed" of your hope in the Lord?
2. Why are we "safe" when we're abiding in the commandments of the Lord?
3. What can we pray when we feel like something is blocking our understanding of Scripture and jeopardizing our view of God?

... true stability is to be found no where else but in the word of God; and that no man can steadfastly lean upon it but he who is strengthened by the power of the Holy Spirit. We must therefore always beseech God, who alone is the author and finisher of faith, to maintain in us this grace. John Calvin (1509-1564), *Commentary on Psalm 119.116*

Pray Psalm 119.113-115.

Commit yourself to sheltering in the Lord and keeping His Word throughout this day. Dedicate every activity to Him.

Sing Psalm 119.113-115.

(Aurelia: *The Church's One Foundation*)

Lord, those who do not trust You with all their mind and heart,
shall soon receive their just due – let them from me depart!
My shelter and my shield, Lord, I hope in all Your Word!

Psalm 119.113-120

To all Your Law I yield, Lord, to live in full accord.

5 Rejection Notice

Pray Psalm 119.118, 119.

You reject all those who stray from Your statutes,
For their deceit is falsehood.
You put away all the wicked of the earth like dross;
Therefore I love Your testimonies.

Sing Psalm 119.118, 119.

(Aurelia: The Church's One Foundation)

All those who from Your path stray, reject and bring to shame.
They mock Your chosen pathway, and scorn Your holy Name.
Like dross cast them away, Lord - the wicked of the earth!
Your Word will I obey, Lord, and praise Your holy worth.

Read Psalm 119.113-120; meditate on verses 118, 119.

Preparation

1. Whom does the Lord reject and put away?
2. How did that make the psalmist feel about God's testimonies?

Meditation

At one point in my life I was writing poems and essays and sending them out to various journals. In those days before the Internet, you had to send an SASE – self-addressed stamped envelope – if you wanted to receive a response. When these came back, I'd open them with high hopes. But by far and away, I received more rejections than I did acceptances.

See, the problem wasn't that I didn't think my writing was good. I was convinced it was. It was just that, well, I failed to meet the standards of the editors. It didn't matter how earnest or persuaded I was about my work; what mattered was their view.

Jesus dealt with a similar situation. On the last day people came to Him, calling Him "Lord, Lord" and all that, hoping that their chosen course and confession of His Name would get them into heaven. But He rejected them, calling them workers of "lawlessness" (Matt. 7.21-23).

Solomon reminds us, "There is a way *that seems* right to a man, but its end *is* the way of death" (Prov. 14.12).

Listen up: If you stray from God's commandments, away from the path of righteousness onto the path of wickedness, you can expect to receive a sad and terrible SASE from Him: REJECTED! You thought your best efforts were like silver. He sees them as dross. Turn from, ignore, neglect, or reject the statutes, commandments, testimonies, and precepts of God's Law and His Word, and no matter how sincere you are or how satisfied you are with your chosen path, you are on the way to rejection, now and forever. Our salvation is not *earned* by keeping God's Law; rather, it is *proved* by our obedience to Jesus' standard.

Treasures Old and New: Matthew 13.52; Psalm 119.162

Work is available, and I must fill out a job application. On it, I am requested to share characteristics about myself. You know, to impress, because I'd like to be part of this company. Here goes: "I like to think that one of my best features is that I am like dross. What is that you ask? Well, here is a word salad to sum up the salient points: something regarded as worthless; rubbish; foreign matter, you know, like dregs or mineral waste. Scum formed on the surface of molten metal. Yep. There you have it. I know you can't wait to hire me. Feel free to call or email me with your offer."

Spoiler alert: I don't think the boss will be impressed.

More importantly, is God impressed with this condition? Or that kind of mindset or heartset? Are we strayers and stragglers from God's Law? Are we deceiving ourselves about the state of our faith? Do we think God is OK with wickedness?

It must be possible for God's people to become like that because many Scriptures speak to this characteristic. Here is what God thinks about it: "Ah, I will rid Myself of My adversaries, and take vengeance on My enemies. I will turn My hand against you, and thoroughly purge away your dross, and take away all your alloy" (Is. 1.25). Fired. But sent for more training.

The word of the LORD came to Ezekiel, and he wrote, "...the house of Israel has become dross to Me...so I will gather you in My anger and in My fury, and I will leave you there and melt you...then you shall know that I, the LORD, have poured out My fury on you" (Ez. 22.18-22). Totally unemployable.

He does indeed "put away the wicked like dross" (Ps. 119. 119). Rejected. Because really, does God want Kingdom-workers to bear that resemblance?

The good news is this: "Take away the dross from silver, and it will go to the silversmith for jewelry" (Prov. 25.4). We can go from being rejected unemployables to employee of the year! With our own parking space. Jesus said, "I go to prepare a place for you" (Jn. 14.2).

We want to be useful servants in the Kingdom of God. We do not want to be dross-like. We want to be fine jewelry that God can use mightily. God told Israel that the Gentiles would see their righteousness. He went on to say: "You shall be called by a new name, which the mouth of the LORD will name. You shall also be a crown of glory in the hand of the LORD, and a royal diadem in the hand of your God...for the LORD delights in you..." (Is. 62.2-4). God gives us a new name and changes us from dross into a jeweled crown.

As "His own special people" we have work to do—that "you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness [drossness] into His marvelous light" (1 Pet. 2.9).

"I love Your testimonies"! (Ps. 119.119).

For reflection

1. What does loving the testimonies of God have to do with the dross that sometimes gathers on our lives?
2. Why is it important that we know and follow Jesus' standard for life in His Kingdom?
3. How does God regard those who "stray" from His Word? What can we do to keep from straying like this?

The prophet means, that, however well pleased the wicked are with their own cunning, they yet do nothing else than deceive themselves with falsehood. And it was needful to add this clause; for we see how the great bulk of mankind are fatally intoxicated with their own vain imaginations, and how difficult it is to believe what is here asserted, — that the more shrewd they are in their own estimation, the more do they deceive themselves. John Calvin (1509-1564), Commentary on Psalm 119.118

Pray Psalm 119.113-115.

Pray for the lost people in your Personal Mission Field. Ask God to soften their hearts toward Him and to give you an opportunity to share His love with one of them today.

Sing Psalm 119.113-115.

(Aurelia: *The Church's One Foundation*)

Psalm 119.113-120

Lord, those who do not trust You with all their mind and heart,
shall soon receive their just due - let them from me depart!
My shelter and my shield, Lord, I hope in all Your Word!
To all Your Law I yield, Lord, to live in full accord.

6 Real Fear

Pray Psalm 119.120.

My flesh trembles for fear of You,
And I am afraid of Your judgments.

Sing Psalm 119.120.

(Aurelia: *The Church's One Foundation*)

In trembling and in fear, Lord, my flesh before You quails,
for when Your Word is near, Lord, then dread in me prevails.
I fear Your holy wrath, Lord - a sinful wretch am I!
Help me to keep Your path, Lord, to live and not to die.

Read Psalm 119.130-120; meditate on verse 120.

Preparation

1. How did the psalmist describe His fear of the Lord?
2. Of what specifically was he afraid?

Meditation

This is not the first time our psalmist has mentioned the fear of the Lord. He sought out the company of those who feared God (v. 64), describing them as people who, as he did, hoped in the Word of God (v. 74) and loved His testimonies (v. 79). Those all seem like a safe “fear” of God, don’t you think? More like “reverence” or “awe” or something along those lines.

I’m sure reverence and awe were very much a feature of the psalmist’s fear of God. But reverence and awe don’t make your flesh crawl. Real fear does. Fear of something alive and too great to fathom. Something immense and terrible. Dangerous. Near.

This is the fear of God Jesus and Paul instructed believers to nurture (Matt. 10.28; 2 Cor. 7.1). Why should we fear God this way? Because He ever lives and is unfathomably great, immeasurably immense, knee-bucklingly terrible, truly dangerous, and constantly near. He is also holy and just and unbending in His expectations. We are none of these things. We are His creatures, to do with as He pleases. And though we know He loves all who hope in Him and love His testimonies, yet we must not take this love for granted.

Love and fear make a two-sided coin, just as love and hate do; and we must be diligent to nurture and sustain each of these affections in our relationship with the living God. For it is fearful thing to be found clasped in His hand and subject to the wrath of His judgments (Heb. 10.31).

Treasures Old and New: Matthew 13.52; Psalm 119.162.

When I was in high school in the sixties, the literature book we used contained Jonathan Edward’s sermon, *Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God*. The picture accompanying the title was of a spider dangling over an open flame. It was fear inspiring. Back then, we were still encouraged to believe there was a right and a wrong way to live; and that book, for general consumption, was still allowed to contain information about God and good and evil behavior. This was a public school. Discipline was still a thing. Fear kept us in line. Did we still do dumb things? Of course, but we possessed a fear that made us want to walk the straight and narrow. And assuredly, the consequences served as elucidating reminders for the next time.

Fear motivates obedience. It constrains us. Everyone knows this. God especially knows this. That is why there are laws. Following the rules out of sheer goodness isn’t always the norm; but fear of consequences might be. Who wants to pay for a speeding ticket? Or go to prison? Who wants to pay a fine at the library for

a late book? (Do they still do that?) We pay our bills because we like having electricity and water. The piper always demands to be paid.

A people with no holy fear can ruin a church and a society. As David opined: “An oracle within my heart concerning the transgression of the wicked: There is no fear of God before his eyes” (Ps. 36.1; Rom. 3.18).

In Psalm 119.120, the psalmist was experiencing physical and mental symptoms of his fear of God. Why? Because he knew God is God, and that He has awesome power. He also has firm and consequentially righteous judgments which He is not afraid to enact. This psalmist knew his Scriptures.

He knew that God did many wondrous and fearful acts as He delivered the children of Israel from Egypt, so much so that Pharaoh’s servants pled with him, asking, “Do you not yet know that Egypt is destroyed?” (Ex. 10:7) The psalmist didn’t want to experience that same destruction.

He knew how Rahab told the spies in Jericho of their fear of God: “And as soon as we heard these things, our hearts melted; neither did there remain any more courage in anyone because of you, for the LORD your God, He is God in heaven above and on earth beneath” (Josh. 2.11). He believed this about God, too.

He had read how the people of Ashdod, Gath, and Ekron captured the ark of God in battle. How the presence of the ark near their impotent god Dagon caused it to fall on its face and break apart. Then, how the hand of the LORD ravaged the soldiers and struck them with tumors and was very heavy upon them. He remembered that they said, “What shall we do with the ark of the God of Israel?” and how they sent it back to Israel having tangled unsuccessfully with God (I Sam. 5.1-6.9). His God.

Story after story in the Bible tells us of God’s awesome and fear-inspiring works. We must listen up and take His power seriously. Take it to heart. Remember the dangling spider (Heb. 10.31). God’s Laws are for keeping. (Ex. 20.1-17) We need to be so afraid of breaking His Laws that our reaction is visceral, like the psalmist’s. We know that “Where there is no prophetic vision, the people cast off restraint; but happy is he who keeps the law” (Prov. 29.18). We want to be restrained and happy because of our love for God’s Law.

The joy we know in God’s grace and mercy must be tempered with an experiential and real fear of Him. That fear will keep us always within the boundaries where God’s love can reach and bless us. (Jude 21)

For reflection

1. Why does it make sense to nurture a healthy fear of God?
2. How do fearing God and loving Him work together to produce obedience to His Law – and the happiness that brings?
3. What would you say to someone who insists we don’t need to fear God?

At first sight the prophet seems to contradict himself. He had just now said, that, by God's severity, he was gently drawn to love his testimonies; now he declares, that he was seized with terror. But although these two effects differ widely from each other, yet, if we consider by what kind of discipline God forms us to reverence his law, we will perceive that they entirely harmonize. John Calvin (1509-1564), Commentary on Psalm 119.120

Pray Psalm 119.116-119.

Where do you especially need the upholding grace and strength of the Lord today? Call on Him to grant it, and listen in prayer as He guides you to His Word for encouragement and instruction.

Sing Psalm 119.116-119.

(Aurelia: The Church’s One Foundation)

Psalm 119.113-120

Uphold me by Your Word, Lord, and keep me from all shame.
Let me live ever forward to glorify Your Name.
Lord, hold me up! Sustain me in all Your holy way.
To keep Your statutes train me, and help me to obey.

All those who from Your path stray, reject and bring to shame.
They mock Your chosen pathway, and scorn Your holy Name.
Like dross cast them away, Lord - the wicked of the earth!
Your Word will I obey, Lord, and praise Your holy worth.

7 Evil Days

Pray Psalm 119.115.

Depart from me, you evildoers,
For I will keep the commandments of my God!

Sing Psalm 119.113-115.

(Aurelia: *The Church's One Foundation*)

Lord, those who do not trust You with all their mind and heart,
shall soon receive their just due – let them from me depart!
My shelter and my shield, Lord, I hope in all Your Word!
To all Your Law I yield, Lord, to live in full accord.

Read Psalm 119.113-120; meditate on verse 115.

Preparation

1. To whom does the psalmist address his words?
2. What does he want of them?

Meditation

More than any previous stanza, the *samek* verses seem to be aware of the presence of wickedness and its strong allure. The “double-minded” and “evildoers” are always near (vv. 113, 115). So also those “who stray” from the Lord and practice deceit with their tongues (v. 118). The wicked are as dross (v. 119) to be cast away as worthless.

Paul wrote that “the days are evil” (Eph. 5.15-17). Consequently, we must not allow our time to be encroached upon or taken over by wickedness in any form. If we shelter in God and His Word (v. 114), we will find a shield to protect us against temptations and threats. Obeying the commandments of God, and all His Word, will keep us from straying (vv. 115, 118) and allow us to know His upholding grace and truth for all things (v. 117). So, too, remembering the promise of God that He will discipline His people when they turn away from Him (v. 120).

God shows us how to deal with wickedness: Put it away from you (v. 119)! Command it to be gone (v. 115)! Reject the ways of wickedness (v. 118)! Seek the company of those who fear the Lord, and make sure you fear Him and not the threats of men (vv. 120).

And let your mindset and heartset be on the Word of God, to know, delight in, and obey it always. Evil has no power over those who stand firm in the Word of the Lord (Matt. 4.1-11).

Treasures Old and New: Matthew 13.52; Psalm 119.162

It is not advisable to dabble in evil or ignore the Law of God!

As Christians we must do things the way God says to do them (Ex. 20.1-17). We must not waffle in our obedience, or quibble about His ways. He knows best. We don't (Deut. 32.46, 47). We must despise the sin that dwells within and without us, depart from evil, and demand that evil depart from us. Solomon twice warned that, “A prudent man foresees evil and hides himself, but the simple pass on and are punished” (Prov. 22.3; 27.12); and he encouraged us that “by the fear of the LORD one departs from evil” (Prov. 16.6).

David wrote an appropriate prayer for us to pray regarding evil: “Oh, that You would slay the wicked, O God! Depart from me, therefore, you bloodthirsty men...Do I not hate them, O LORD, who hate You? And do I not loathe those who rise up against You? I hate them with perfect hatred; I count them my enemies”

(Ps. 139.19, 21, 22).

I was lovingly warned years ago to, “Watch your deviations!” And I freely pass that warning on to you. Falling into sin happens gradually. We let this little thing into our thinking, or we allow that little sin to gingerly creep into our way of life. We slowly begin to tolerate things that were once displeasing to us (and most assuredly are displeasing to God) because the world tells us we should. Or we think we should. Thus, we gradually deviate from the Law of God. We mistakenly test and try Him. We should not.

Here is what we should do: We should keep our eyes fully on God and stay focused on what He has called us to do. “For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them” (Eph. 2.10). And we should pray like David did. After he had prayed against the wicked, he prayed for himself: “Search me, O God, and know my heart; try me, and know my anxieties; and see if there is any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting” (Ps. 139.23, 24).

Striving to be holy, as God is holy, is a full-time job (1 Pet. 1.16; Ps. 90.12).

Our psalmist wrote a checklist to help us reach that goal:

1. Don't be double-minded.
2. Don't mess with evildoers.
3. Don't be ashamed of your hope.
4. Don't stray or deviate from God's Laws.
5. Don't be like dross.
6. Do hope in His Word.
7. Do love His Law.
8. Do observe His statutes continually.
9. Do fear Him and His judgments. (Ps. 119.113-120)

Consequently, “He who heeds the word [the checklist] wisely will find good, and whoever trusts in the LORD, happy is he” (Prov. 16.20), and “Happy are the people whose God is the LORD!” (Ps. 144.15)

“Evil has no power over those who stand firm in the Word of the Lord.”

For reflection

1. Why do you think Christians fall into wicked practices from time to time?
2. What should we do if we find this to be the case in our own lives?
3. How can believers help one another to hate evil and wickedness and cling to what is good?

The dangerous influence of fellowship with wicked men is but too evident from observation; and to this it is owing, that few continue in their integrity to the close of life, the world being fraught with corruptions. From the extreme infirmity of our nature, it is the easiest thing in the world to catch infection, and to contract pollution even from the slightest touch. The prophet, then, with good reason, bids the wicked depart from him, that he may advance in the fear of God without obstruction. John Calvin (1509-1564), Commentary on Psalm 119.115

Pray Psalm 119.116-120.

Call on the Lord to keep You in His pathway and to guard you from all evil and affliction this day and throughout the week ahead.

Sing Psalm 119.116-120.

(Aurelia: *The Church's One Foundation*)

Uphold me by Your Word, Lord, and keep me from all shame.

Psalm 119.113-120

Let me live ever forward to glorify Your Name.
Lord, hold me up! Sustain me in all Your holy way.
To keep Your statutes train me, and help me to obey.

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Like dross cast them away, Lord - the wicked of the earth!
Your Word will I obey, Lord, and praise Your holy worth.

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for when Your Word is near, Lord, then dread in me prevails.
I fear Your holy wrath, Lord - a sinful wretch am I!
Help me to keep Your path, Lord, to live and not to die.

Questions for Reflection or Discussion

1. Evil is all around us, all the time. How should you prepare each day to deal with it?
2. Why is it important to hate evil? What should that look like in your life?
3. How does this stanza of Psalm 119 lead us to regard the Law and Word of God?
4. In what sense are the fear of God and love for God complementary affections?
5. What's the most important lesson you've learned from this part of our study of Psalm 119?

For prayer:

The Fellowship of Ailbe

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Thank you.