

Loving the Word

Our scheduled readings for the day bring us to consider a portion of Psalm 119, and it is to the section of verses 97 to 104 that we shall go for words of exhortation. The first verse in this section expresses the Psalmists love for the words of God:

“O how *I love* thy law! It is my meditation all the day.” (Psa. 119:1).

The loving of the law of God is a characteristic of the faithful, who search the Scriptures daily as circumstances allow, and this is by no means the only passage in the Psalms that expresses such a sentiment. The very first Psalm reads:

“Blessed is the man that walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor standeth in the way of sinners, nor sitteth in the seat of the scornful. But *his delight is in the law of Yahweh; and in his law doth he meditate day and night*” (Psa. 1:1-2).

Notice the contrast here: rather than to conform to the ways of the ungodly, the righteous keeps himself separate – and the means by which he can achieve this, is to meditate in the law day and night. The Apostle cites this Psalm:

“*I delight in the law of God* after the inward man: but I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members” (Rom. 7:22-23).

The context is to do with an internal struggle between two principles: the love for the Word of God and the accompanying desire to follow it, and the natural inclination of the flesh, styled in this chapter as “sin that dwelleth in me”. There is enmity between the two, as Paul expresses it elsewhere:

“the flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh: and these things are contrary the one to the other: so that ye cannot do the things that ye would” (Gal. 5:17).

We are yet “without strength” (Rom. 5:6) to save ourselves, and overcome this sin that doth so easily beset us – but through Christ we achieve the victory, and can rejoice with Paul: “I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord. So then, with the mind I myself serve the law of God; but with the flesh, the law of sin” (Rom. 7:25). That is to say, his mind was dominated with spiritual thoughts, and when he sinned it was not of his own will, but a consequence of the sinful nature possessed by all of Adam’s progeny.

The first Epistle of John describes the means by which we might control our sinful desires: “whosoever is born of God doth not commit sin; *for his seed remaineth in him*: and he cannot sin, because he is born of God” (1 Jno. 3:9). The brethren in Christ do continue to sin: we do not have the strength to overcome our own flawed nature. But when they do, it is not the “inward man” that sins, but the old man of the flesh which raises its head from time to time, and which we seek to crucify daily. The seed of the word remains in our thinking, and influences our minds to become spiritual, that is, dominated by spiritual thoughts.

In Psalm 119, and Psalm 1 (above), the Psalmist describes how out of love for the Law, he meditated upon it daily – in fact, all the day. It is a consistent principle of Scripture that we must continually attend to the Word, as opportunity arises:

“Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth” (2 Tim. 2:15).

Combining the senses of these verses, we find that Christ’s brethren do not study the word out of compulsion, but of desire. We enjoy finding the hidden treasures of the Word, and delight in learning new things.

We might ask the question, how can we possibly meditate on the Word all the day long: we have other things which we must do; daily chores and work. The answer to the problem comes when we realize the meaning of the Hebrew word for “meditate”. Literally, it means to “speak”: the Word speaks to us throughout the day. We seek to apply the principles of the Word in whatever circumstance we find ourselves. And as we conduct our daily business, we will find that verses of Scripture that we have committed to memory come to mind in particularly appropriate circumstances. We seek to follow those passages as a guide to how to conduct ourselves throughout the day. But if we do not study the word, it will not be dwelling in us, and we will lose the great strength and comfort that it can give.

The Psalmist continues to describe the wisdom that the Word can give:

“thou hast made me *wiser than mine enemies*: for they are ever with me. I have *more understanding than all my teachers*: for thy testimonies are my meditation” (Psa. 119:98-99).

This is another delightful effect of a continual application to the testimonies of Scripture: it will give us a wisdom that greatly surpasses those who do not engage in regular Bible study. Jeremiah portrays Israel, and the wise men thereof, as spurning the revealed Word:

“how do you say we are wise, and the law of Yahweh is with us? Lo, certainly in vain made he it; the pen of the scribes is in vain. The wise men are ashamed and taken: lo, *they have rejected the word of Yahweh*; and what wisdom is in them?” (Jer. 8:8-9).

Here were the great men of the age - but yet they rejected and spurned the Word of God. Professing themselves to be wise, they become fools by comparison. The same is true today: great men of the clergy portray themselves as wise authorities of the Bible, whereas their wisdom is seen to be but folly when compared with the faith of the humblest of Christ’s brethren. So “it is written, I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and will bring to nothing the understanding of the prudent. Where is the wise? Where is the disputer of this world? Hath not God *made foolish* the wisdom of this world?” (1 Cor. 1:19-20). The calling of God does not appeal to those who are wise in their own conceits: it is rather extended to those who would delight in, and embrace the Word of God, and the promises it contains. “ye see your calling, brethren, how that not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble are called: but

God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; and God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty” (1 Cor. 1:27).

Christ’s brethren therefore, in whatever circumstances they find themselves in, possess a wisdom that is greater than those who would profess to be teachers, and greater still than their enemies.

In these things, we have as a preeminent example in Messiah himself. Being but 12 years of age, he was in the presence of the “doctors” of divinity of their day, “both hearing them, and asking them questions. And all that heard him were astonished at his understanding and answers: (Lu. 2:47-48). At the tender age of 12, Christ’s wisdom was greater than the teachers in Jerusalem – teachers that soon became his foes.

Of course, it almost goes without saying that wisdom is something to be implemented. It is the ‘doing’ part of knowledge: i.e. we act on and apply the knowledge of Scripture to the various circumstances of our lives. That is wisdom: the application of knowledge.

Verse 101 of our section of verses then, tells us the consequence of keeping wisdom:

“I have refrained my feet from every ***evil way***, that I might keep thy word” (Psa. 119:101).

There is a way that is evil, and which we must not walk along. Proverbs chapter 1 exhorts the student of the Word to avoid the path of the wicked: “My son, ***walk not thou in the way with them; refrain thy foot from their path ...***” (Prov. 1:15). Again, Psalm 1, which we just looked at, speaks the same sentiments:

“blessed is the man that ***walketh not*** in the counsel of the ungodly, nor standeth in ***the way of sinners***, nor sitteth in the seat of the scornful” (Psa. 1:1).

“The way of sinners”, AKA, the “evil way” of Psalm 119 is something to be avoided at all costs. Messiah himself taught that there are essentially two ways traversed by all of mankind: a broad way, able to easily accommodate the multitudes, and a narrow way, whose entrance must be diligently sought for:

“Enter ye in at the strait gate; for wide is the gate, and broad is the way, that leadeth to destruction, and many there by which go in thereat: Because strait is the gate, and narrow is the way which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it” (Mat. 7:13-14).

The majority of mankind walk forward into destruction at the last, whereas Christ’s brethren walk a lonely path, with only a comparative “few” for company along the way – but theirs is the Way of Life. But how can it be so? How can so many people have got it all wrong? Why should we suppose that we are in the right, considering that we are in the minority? The answer is in Proverbs 14:

“there is a way which seemeth right unto a man, but the end thereof are the ways of death” (Prov. 14:12).

This is the “broad way” – it seems to be right until scrutinized carefully in the light of Scripture, and being wide, it is able to accommodate all the things that ‘narrow minded’ brethren cannot accept. But it leads to no other destination, than death.

Going back to Psalm 119, verse 103 returns to the delightful aspect of the word: it is pleasant to partake of, comparative to sweet honey to the taste:

“How sweet are thy words unto my taste! Yea, *sweeter far than honey* to my mouth” (Psa. 119:103).

Psalm 19 speaks likewise:

“... the judgments of Yahweh are true and righteous altogether. More to be desired are they than gold: *sweeter also than honey, and the honeycomb*. Moreover, by them is thy servant warned: and in keeping of them there is great reward” (Psa. 19:10-11).

More precious than gold itself, the judgments of Yahweh are greatly to be desired. There is pleasure in partaking of it: we have often found that even just the reading of the Word can calm the mind, and lift it to a higher plane. Truly, it is sweet to the Bible Student.

Psalm 34 also speaks in this vein:

“*O taste*, and see that Yahweh is good: blessed is the man that trusteth in him” (Psa. 34:8).

We must esteem the commandments of God as being of greater importance than our daily food, and “taste” them daily. For those who say they have no time for Bible Study: Do you find time to eat your food? Then why not the Spiritual food? Cut something out of your activities if necessary: turn the internet, radio, or television off, and read your Bible instead – the benefits will greatly outweigh the sacrifice.

This section of Psalm 119 ends with verse 104:

“through thy precepts I get understanding: therefore *I hate* every false way” (Psa. 119:104).

This aspect of hate is something that many of our generation do not understand. “God is love,” we are told, and we ought not hate others. Truly it is that “God is love,” but He is also a God of righteousness and judgment. He does not love those who corrupt His Word into another gospel, which is impotent to save. There is a time and place for all things: “a time to love, *and a time to hate*; a time of war, and a time of peace” (Eccl. 3:8). Indeed, Proverbs defines the fear of Yahweh for us: “the fear of Yahweh *is to hate evil*: pride, and arrogancy, and the evil way, and the froward mouth, *do I hate*” (Prov. 8:13).

As we come to focus our attention on the sacrifice of our Lord Jesus Christ, we behold both love and hate. Hatred of sin, but love extending to those who repent, and seek first the kingdom of God in their lives. In the death of our Master, we receive love and forgiveness, and in his resurrection, we have a hope of an endless life with him. The commandments of God are able to make us wise unto salvation, and a love for them indicates a mind which is healthy in spiritual things.

The 1st Epistle of John has as its main theme, the aspect of love. Chapter two indicates those things that we ought not love:

“love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world. And the world passeth away, and the lust thereof: but he that doeth the will of God abideth for ever” (1 Jno. 2:15-17).

If we love the things of the spirit of God, we will inevitably hate those things that belong to the world. But our hope is not negative, focusing on those hateful things of the flesh, but positive, focusing on the forgiveness of God through the shed blood of His son. Here is the exhortation: if we love the Word, we will love those who follow that Word.

“Beloved, let us love one another: for love is of God; and every one that loveth is born of God, and knoweth God. He that loveth not knoweth not God; for God is love. In this was manifested the love of God towards us, because that God sent his only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through him ...” (1 Jno. 4:7-9).

As we come to the emblems of bread and wine, we behold tokens of love, which speak to us of the sacrifice of our absent Master, and the certain hope that he will surely come at the time appointed by the Father. But the love which we behold, and seek to reciprocate is not a passive emotion, but something which finds its outworking in a practical reality: the crucifixion of the flesh. Even as Christ loved us, we ought to love one another, and help each other along the way. Here is the example of true love: the laying down of life for one's friends (Jno. 15:30). Even as Christ laid down his life for his brethren, we ought lay down our lives in service to each other, and to Him, seeing to reciprocate that love shown to us. And then, being amongst that band of men who love the appearing of Christ, we shall be given entry into the kingdom to come, to live and reign with Messiah throughout the ages to come.

Christopher Maddocks