



CAPITOL COMMISSION

The Authority of God's Word

PSALM 119 SELECTED VERSES

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What comes to your mind when you think of the Bible? Is it "The Good Book", a collection of nice stories and good advice? Is it a "manual for life" to help find comfort, success, purpose, and fulfillment? Is it simply a work of man – fables and stories collected and altered over the years? The author of Psalm 119 certainly saw the Scriptures as much more than this. He believed the Bible to be the very Words of God Himself as He communicates and reveals Himself to us so that we might understand Him and know His will. As such, he recognized a vital aspect of the Bible: its AUTHORITY. The Scripture's authority is clearly described. As we begin to consider this, let us again read the next section of our Psalm:

Yodh

⁷³Your hands made me and fashioned me;
Give me understanding, that I may learn Your commandments.

⁷⁴May those who fear You see me and be glad,
Because I wait for Your word.

⁷⁵I know, O LORD, that Your judgments are righteous,
And that in faithfulness You have afflicted me.

⁷⁶O may Your lovingkindness comfort me,
According to Your word to Your servant.

⁷⁷May Your compassion come to me that I may live,
For Your law is my delight.

⁷⁸May the arrogant be ashamed, for they subvert me with a lie;
But I shall meditate on Your precepts.

⁷⁹May those who fear You turn to me,
Even those who know Your testimonies.

⁸⁰May my heart be blameless in Your statutes,
So that I will not be ashamed.

THE AUTHORITY OF GOD'S WORD IS DETERMINED BY ITS AUTHOR

In Psalm 119 we find 176 verses dedicated to God's Word. Nearly every verse speaks directly of the Scriptures. The writer praises them for their divine nature and power; proclaims a desire to know, comprehend, and follow; and prays for God's help to understand and obey. There are two other features we have not yet pointed out. First is how much of this chapter is actually in the form of prayer directly to God. The first three verses give a general introduction. The remaining 173 verses are in

essence a prayer to God. This demonstrates that the writer clearly recognized God as the author and source of the Scriptures.

The second aspect is the constant use of the simple little words "of" and "Your" to describe God's Word. There are at least eight different words or synonyms used for the Scriptures throughout Psalm 119. In nearly every instance the term is described with the prepositional phrase "of the Lord" or the possessive pronoun "your". Through poetic repetition the author vividly proclaims that the Scriptures come from God. They are His Words. They are God's own expression and relation of His nature, character, and will. This is why the author treasured and valued the holy writings. What a privilege to hold in his hands the very Word of God! This is a truth given us in the New Testament as well. Paul proclaims in 2 Timothy 3:16-17 that **"All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; so that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work."** "Inspired" literally means "God-breathed", describing for us how God breathed out His word to us as we have it recorded in the Bible.

We cannot separate the Psalmist's love for God's Word from his love for God Himself. A number of verses speak of his appreciation for God's character, nature, and attributes. (:55) **I remember your name in the night...** (:68) **You are good and do good...** (:73) **Your hands made me and fashioned me...** (:137) **Righteous are You, O LORD...** (:156) **Great is Your mercy...** The writer of this Psalm loved, esteemed, and treasured God's Word because He loved, esteemed, treasured God. Because He had a high and exalted view of God, he had a high and exalted view of His Word. If we neglect or denigrate the Scriptures, we must consider carefully our view of and attitude towards God. It is love for God that leads us to obey Him, as Christ taught, **"If you love Me, you will keep My commandments."** John 14:15

THE AUTHORITY OF GOD'S WORD IS DESCRIBED BY THE TERMS USED IN PSALM 119

We see at least eight different words used to identify and define the Scriptures. While this was partly a poetic use of synonyms, it also shows the broad, multifaceted glory of God's Word. It demonstrates the broad nature of the Bible and what our response must be towards it. Most of them point us directly to the authority God's Word has in our lives. Let us look briefly at these terms:

BIBLE STUDIES

INTERIM BIBLE STUDY

THURSDAY, MAY 25 8:00 A.M & 12:00 NOON * SENATE PRESIDENT'S CONFERENCE ROOM (M219) * BREAKFAST & LUNCH PROVIDED

West Virginia

The Authority of God's Word

Law (:1) This term simply means 'teaching'. It identifies the Scripture in general as God's teaching or instruction. That is to say it is God giving instruction to His people regarding their life and conduct. It is an explanation of God's will for man's life.

Testimonies (:2) This word means to give testimony or bear witness as in a legal proceeding. The Bible is God's own personal testimony. It is His self-revelation, it is His own witness as to His character and His will. When you read Scripture, you're getting to know God and His will for our lives.

Precepts (:4) The basic meaning of this word is to exercise oversight over a subordinate. As used here it refers to the responsibilities that God places upon His people. We recognize God as our superior, master, and leader and look to fulfill the responsibilities He has given to us.

Statutes (:5) The original word for statute means 'to cut or engrave'. It was common practice for ancient people to engrave laws on a slab of metal or stone and set them up in a public place. The term came to mean a rule or law given which should be obeyed. We have God's statutes "engraved" upon the pages of His Word readily available for us to read, understand, and obey.

Commandments (:6) This word simply refers to a command or charge. It can refer to the terms of a contract or covenant or to the instructions given by a teacher to their student. It points to the authority of the one issuing the command and the necessity of the one receiving it to obey. We are most familiar with this as we all think of "The Ten Commandments".

Judgments / Ordinances (:7, 13) The primary meaning of this word refers to the process of government. In our form of government the functions are divided up among the executive, legislative, and judicial branches. In God's Word all these functions are found in God as He is the King of Kings, the Lawgiver, and the ultimate Judge of all mankind.

Word (:11) Simply means "to speak" or "that which is spoken". We use words to communicate any fact, truth, or idea with each other. God has chosen to communicate with us through His Word His laws and commands but also His very nature and character.

Ways (:3) Literally a "road or path". It speaks of a path worn by constant walking. God's Word lays out for us the way we should live. It points out the only way to be right with God. Ultimately we see this way in Jesus Christ as He proclaimed, "I am the way..." (John 14:6)

In light of holding our Bible studies here in the capitol among those who serve in the executive, legislative, and judicial branches of government, it is interesting to note how many of these terms are legal descriptions.

"Law", "testimonies", "precepts", "statutes", "commandments", and "judgments" each carry legal or legislative ideas. These terms describe the authority the Bible carries over our life and faith. Our federal and state laws have authority because authority has been granted those bodies by the people. God's laws, statutes, and commandments have authority because they are given by the holy, almighty God, the creator of the universe and everything in it. As His creation, each one of us is answerable and responsible to Him, to follow and obey His Word.

There is a tremendous difference between the law we find in the West Virginia code and the law God has given to us in His Word. As a matter of fact, to see the Bible as simply a collection of rules and commandments similar to human law causes us to fail to treasure and value it as we should. Human law is given to restrain evil and promote good (Romans 13). God's law is an expression of His nature and character. As a matter of fact, God's law is given to demonstrate to us how unlike God we actually are. When we consider just the Ten Commandments we realize immediately how each of us fails to keep God's law. How many lies have we told? How many lustful thoughts have we had? How many times have we been angry with others? (Remember our lessons from the Sermon on the Mount?). This is why Paul wrote that **"the Law has become our tutor to lead us to Christ, so that we may be justified by faith."** (Galatians 3:24). It is when we realize our sinfulness in failing to keep God's law that we understand we must repent and turn in faith to Christ and His suffering and death on the Cross. Christ perfectly kept God's law and lived a perfect life so that our sin might be given to Him and His goodness given to us. To make us realize this is the purpose of God's law. This is why the writer of Psalm 119 treasured the Word so greatly.

THE AUTHORITY OF GOD'S WORD DEMANDS OUR RESPONSE

What is our response to the authority of God's Word? Martin Lloyd-Jones sums it up well:

We all therefore have to face this ultimate and final question: Do we accept the Bible as the Word of God, as the sole authority in all matters of faith and practice, or do we not? Is the whole of my thinking governed by Scripture, or do I come with my reason and pick and choose out of Scripture and sit in judgment upon it, putting myself and modern knowledge forward as the ultimate standard and authority? The issue is crystal clear. Do I accept Scripture as a revelation from God, or do I trust to speculation, human knowledge, human learning, human understanding and human reason.