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### Great Words of the Faith #3 Illumination Psalm 119:18

One pastor did a survey asking the reasons why people do not read the Bible. He shares the top three: Number three: "It is old and boring". Number two: "I get busy with other things and forget to read it". And the number one answer: "I don't understand it". Certainly, there are many who fail to read the Bible for the reasons given above. Some outright reject God's Word, believing it to merely be a collection of the writings of men. Most simply neglect or ignore the Word as they go about their daily lives. Some might try but give up when they find it difficult to understand. Why is this so? Why do some treasure God's Word while others reject or neglect it? I believe we find the answer to this query in the great word of the faith in today's study – ILLUMINATION. As we continue our studies of some of the great words of the faith, it is important that we stop and consider how we need God's help to understand these wonderful truths.

As we study some of the great words of the faith found in the Bible, we acknowledge that some of them can be difficult to understand. We have considered the Trinity, the truth that there is one God who exists in three persons. In our next study we will consider God's sovereignty – how He rules and reigns over all things yet allows and works through the will and choices of people. We certainly need God's help to understand and appreciate these and other magnificent truths found in the Bible. We have a whole chapter and a wonderful verse to help us know the key to understanding God's Word.<sup>1</sup>

Psalm 119 is the longest chapter in the Bible – 176 verses. The theme of the whole chapter is the Word of God. It has a unique structure as it is divided into groups of eight verses with each verse of the group beginning with the succeeding letter of the Hebrew alphabet. You can see that Hebrew letter at the beginning of each section in your Bible. This structure provided emphasis and helped with memorization. After the first four verses introduce the theme, every verse is a prayer either praising the glories of God's word or asking for God's help to understand and apply the scriptures. In verse 18 we find a prayer each of us should remember when we come to read and study God's Word:

***"Open my eyes, that I may behold wonderful things from Your law". Psalm 119:18***

#### **There are Wonderful things to Be Seen in God's Word**

"Open my eyes, that I may behold **wonderful things** from Your law". Psalm 119:18

'Law' refers to the whole of God's instruction and teaching throughout God's word, here specifically referring to the Old Testament. Indeed, there are 'wonderful things' to be found in God's revelation of Himself and His teaching to us. The Bible reveals to us the glory, holiness, character,

and nature of God. In the Scriptures we see what God requires and how to live a life pleasing to Him. We find the brutally honest description of our dreadful condition apart from Christ: Dead in trespasses and sins, living in the lusts and desires of our flesh, separate from Christ, without God and without hope in the world. (Eph. 2:1, 12) Yet we go on to read how God, being rich in mercy and love, sent Christ to suffer and die that we might be saved by grace through faith. This is a free gift that God has provided for us (Eph. 2:8) When we repent and place our faith in Christ, we are "made alive together with Christ" (Eph. 2:5). This is the Gospel, the focal point of the "wonderful things" we find in His Word. We find that many, even as they may try to read the Bible have no understanding of or appreciation for these wonderful truths.

#### **We Cannot See These Wonderful Things Without God's Help**

***Open my eyes***, that I may behold wonderful things from Your law".

For us to genuinely grasp the "wonderful things" found in God's Word we need a special work of God in our lives. This work is often referred to as "illumination" which is the work of God through the Holy Spirit upon our minds and hearts enabling us to understand the Word of God. This goes beyond knowledge of the history, facts, and even the theology and doctrine found in the Bible. It is not just a "head understanding" but a "heart understanding" of the truths of Scripture.

As Jonathan Edwards described it, this illumination gives us "*a real sense and understanding of the divine excellency of the things revealed in the Word of God*". There is gained "*a true sense of the excellency of God and Jesus Christ, and of the work of redemption, and the ways and works of God revealed in the gospel.*"<sup>1</sup> Edwards further describes, "*He that is spiritually enlightened does*

not merely rationally believe that God is glorious, but he has a sense of the gloriousness of God in his heart. There is not only a rational belief that God is holy, and that holiness is a good thing, but there is a sense of the loveliness of God's holiness."<sup>2</sup>

In many places, the Bible makes it clear why we must have God's help to have this kind of understanding of His Word. If we are "spiritually dead" apart from Christ, then we do not have the ability understand God's Word. Several passages describe our inability to understand Scriptures:

***But a natural man does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually appraised. 1 Cor 2:14***

***And even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing, in whose case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelieving so that they might not see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God. 2 Cor 4:3-4***

Paul goes on in 2 Corinthians 4 to describe what takes place so that we might understand the gospel:

***For we do not preach ourselves but Christ Jesus as Lord, and ourselves as your bond-servants for Jesus' sake. For God, who said, "Light shall shine out of darkness," is the One who has shone in our hearts to give the Light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ. 2 Cor 4:6***

It is God who "shines in our hearts" to give us the light and knowledge of God's glory in Christ. This work takes place when we are saved through repentance and faith in Christ. At this point we are given the Holy Spirit Who works in our hearts and minds to understand the Scriptures. (John 16:12-15; 1 John 2:20, 27; Eph. 3:16-19) If this is a work that only God can do, this brings us to the third important thing we learn from our verse.

### **We Must Pray to God for His Help (Illumination) in Order to Truly Understand the Scriptures.**

We see this prayer for God to give understanding and knowledge repeated over and over throughout Psalm 119. Let this encourage us to several kinds of prayer with which we can approach our pursuit of treasuring God's Word:

**1. Pray that God will teach us His Word.** In Verse 12 we read "...Teach me Your statutes". We can only truly learn God's Word if God Himself becomes the teacher in and through all the other means of learning. When we read and study the Word of God on our own, we should pray for God to teach us. When we go to church and hear a message or sermon, we should ask God to instruct us. As we go about our daily lives, we should plead for God to demonstrate how His Word applies to every situation.

**2. Pray that God will make us understand His Word.** Psalm 119:27 requests, "***Make me understand the way of***

***Your precepts...***" We must ask God to do whatever it takes to cause us to grasp the real meaning of His Word. We should pray we might understand how sinful and wicked we really are before Him. We should ask God to show what it really meant for the holy, perfect, sinless Son of God, Who knew no sin, to be made sin for us when He suffered and died on the cross. (2 Cor. 5:21) Sure we may mentally assent to these facts, but do we really understand what these things mean?

**3. Pray that God will incline our hearts to His Word.** The prayer in verse 36 is "Incline my heart to Your testimonies, and not to dishonest gain". Our problem with the Word of God is not primarily our minds but our wills. We are not naturally inclined to read, study, and follow the Scriptures. We need to plead for God to incline our hearts – our wills to pursue His Word.

**4. Pray for God to give the life and ability to keep His Word.** Verse 88 reads, "Revive me according to Your lovingkindness, so that I may keep the testimony of Your mouth." We have already considered how apart from Christ we are spiritually dead, unable to seek God or follow His ways. We need the life and strength He gives us through Christ in order to give ourselves to learn and obey His Word.

**5. Pray that God will establish our steps in His Word.** In verse 133 we find the request, "Establish my footsteps in Your word..." We are dependent upon God not only for understanding the Word, but for the strength and ability to follow it as well. We cannot do this in our own strength, so we pray for God to help us obey and follow Him. This drives us to pray for His help and strength.

### **Conclusion**

As we read and study God's word, we should constantly keep the Psalmist's prayer as our own, "***Open my eyes, that I may behold wonderful things from Your law***". This is certainly true of the grand difficult doctrines like the Trinity or the sovereignty of God. But we need to pray that God gives us a heart understanding and appreciation for the "basic" truths of the Bible: The glory and holiness of God; our own sinfulness and wretchedness before Him; and the glorious truth of gospel and the forgiveness we find through Christ.

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<sup>1</sup> Outline & material for this study adapted from a sermon by John Piper. *Open My Eyes that I May See*. January 4, 1998. <http://www.desiringgod.org>

<sup>2</sup> Edwards, Jonathan. *A Divine and Supernatural Light Imparted to the Soul by the Spirit of God*. Sermon published in 1743.

### **CAPITOL BIBLE STUDIES**

Thursdays,

12:00 PM McManus Conference Room (M252 by House Min Ofc)