

Beholding God's Supreme Word

Psalm 119:17-24

In life we encounter the problems of suffering, sin, and strife. How do we deal with them? The Psalmist prays to know and obey God's Word in the midst of suffering, sin and strife. It is a cry for God's help. Yet he takes solace in God's Word to support, sustain and satisfy him.

I. Request for God's Abundant Provision¹

17 Deal bountifully with your servant, that I may live and keep your word.

(V17) deal bountifully: Treat me according to your complete/unlimited goodness or kindness. Render overflowing grace. The Psalmist does not appeal to personal merit or desert (e.g, I earned this or deserve it!) but grace and mercy.

God's goodness and grace revealed in Scripture is the starting-point to make sense of life. God in His providence plans and permits pain, pressure, and persecution in our lives to achieve greater goods. One of those goods is virtue—humility against pride—and faith against doubt—an awareness of our dependence upon God as the most perfect being—the highest good. It's as if the Psalmist is asking, "God by your grace give me a heart that obeys your Word."

¹ Outline is adapted from Pastor Brian Borgman's Exposition of Psalm 119.

(V17) with your servant/slave: the term expresses a commitment to follow or obey. E.g., Master/servant relationship.

(V17) that I may live: The Psalmist expresses his utter dependence upon God's provision and preservation for life.

Life or existence is an intrinsically good gift bestowed by God's grace.²

Psalm 119:68

68 Thou [God] art good, and doest good; teach me your statutes.

good (Hebrew טוֹב *ṭôḇ*) expresses intrinsic moral goodness. God is infinitely and intrinsically morally good thus always does what is good. God's essential nature and character is the source and standard of goodness.

Gen 1:31

31 And God saw everything that he had made, and behold, it was very good.

Romans 11:33-36

33 Oh, the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments and how inscrutable his ways!

34 "For who has known the mind of the Lord, or who has been his counselor?"

² I am following Thomas Aquinas here. I take it being is a greater good than non-being. Spurgeon makes the further point that well-being is greater than mere being.

35 “Or who has given a gift to him that he might be repaid?”

36 For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be glory forever. Amen.

God is the creator, sustainer and goal of all things.

Acts 17:24-28

24 The God who made the world and everything in it, being Lord of heaven and earth, does not live in temples made by man,

25 nor is he served by human hands, as though he needed anything, since he himself gives to all mankind life and breath and everything.

26 And he made from one man every nation of mankind to live on all the face of the earth, having determined allotted periods and the boundaries of their dwelling place,

27 that they should seek God, and perhaps feel their way toward him and find him. Yet he is actually not far from each one of us,

28 for“ ‘In him we live and move and have our being’

Life is grounded and guided by God’s goodness through His providence, provision, and preservation. God is our support and strength at all times! You should live prayerfully and consciously knowing your life depends upon God’s grace. Do you see life as a precious gift? Do you see your life as worth living because it is a gift from God?

When life seems to suffocate you. As you feel suffering, sorrow, struggle or strife. Are you receiving and resting in God’s goodness as your support and strength in your darkest

hour? God has not left you alone to yourself. Recognize God directs all things to bring about your good—even when you cannot see it at the present moment due to your limited knowledge. You can know this from God's Word.

God has demonstrated His goodness toward us. God gives us the gift of temporal life which is infinitesimal compared to His greatest gift offered to us—eternal life in His Son. God gave His Son's life for you that you might live forever in Him.

The world would have us live for earthly pleasures (e.g, food, sex, sleep, comfort). A bovine existence.³ Live and act like non-human animals. But God calls us to live for Him—not by the flesh but by the Spirit with His Word.

(V17) that I may live and keep your word.

The Psalmist petitions God to give him the necessary and sufficient grace to fulfill his purpose— live in obedience to God's Word, through God's Word and for God's Word—as it discloses the heart and mind of God.

God's Word is divinely inspired or God-breathed for faith and practice. Our great triune God is the ultimate author, sustainer and goal of all Scripture (special revelation) for us to know (doctrine), love and serve (duties) God in the gospel.

2 Tim. 3:16-17

³ I think I heard this phrase from John Stewart Mill's work on ethics.

16 All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness,

17 that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.

2 Peter 1:3, 5-9

3 His divine power has granted to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of him who called us to his own glory and excellence,

5 For this very reason, make every effort to supplement your faith with virtue, and virtue with knowledge,

6 and knowledge with self-control, and self-control with steadfastness, and steadfastness with godliness,

7 and godliness with brotherly affection, and brotherly affection with love.

8 For if these qualities are yours and are increasing, they keep you from being ineffective or unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.

9 For whoever lacks these qualities is so nearsighted that he is blind, having forgotten that he was cleansed from his former sins.

Scripture is completely and entirely inerrant, clear, infallible, necessary, sufficient, supreme, authoritative, self-attesting and self-authenticating. It is all that we need for spiritual knowledge, wisdom and virtue. Since God alone discloses who and what God is, God reveals Himself in a way

consistent with who and what God is.⁴ Christopher Cloos helps us to understand this further. God is the most perfect being (e.g, Supreme, All-Good, All-Powerful, All-Knowing, All-Wise). When God communicates truth God communicates truth supremely and perfectly without error, defect or deficiency. God has communicated truth in the Scriptures supremely and perfectly as the inspired, infallible and inerrant Word of God. This is why rival authorities (e.g., Sacred Tradition, the Magisterium, Papal Authority and Conciliar ecumenical councils) are unnecessary lest they deny God's perfections. God's Word explicitly or implicitly provides a consistent and coherent explanation of life with a livable hope and fulfillment in the gospel.⁵ The gospel proclaims good news of eternal life, neither earned nor deserved, freely offer to all in God's Son, Jesus Christ.

Humans are to know God through His Word and live in light of God's Word—the principles, promises, patterns, purposes and practices.

II. Request for Divine Illumination of God's Word

18 Open my eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of your law.

(V18) Open my eyes, that I may behold

⁴ Christopher Cloos, *But Who Gave You The Bible?*, 2026, p.11-16.

⁵ This is likely from Gordon H. Clark and James N. Anderson's influence.

The Psalm requests for God's illumination.⁶ God reveal directly or indirectly your knowledge and wisdom that enlightens, equips and empowers me to obey you. The metaphor of sight or perception gives the impression we are spiritually blind or have a spiritual blind spot that prevents us from seeing, knowing, and obeying God apart from divine intervention and illumination. This is not a denial of the clarity of Scripture but rather an affirmation of our corrupt human natures blinded by sin.

(V18) wondrous things: marvelous, beautiful, excellent things

(V18) law(torah): revelation, instruction, teaching, doctrine, or law.

If this term is interpreted as the Mosaic law covenant then it does not, without qualification, apply to Christians who are under the New law covenant. The Mosaic law covenant was fulfilled and completed in Christ. It is no longer operative for Christians as a law covenant (Matthew 5:17-20; Rom 7:1-6; 1 Corinthians 9:19-23; 2 Corinthians 3:1-18; Hebrews 7:12, 8:13). But Christians are under the Law of Christ in the New Covenant. All of Scripture is authoritative for us and must be properly interpreted and applied in light of Christ. There is overlap in covenant laws since there are absolute laws that

⁶ E.g., Balaam (Num. 22:31) Elisha's servant (2 Kings 6:17). Ike Miller takes divine illumination as human participation in the divine Son's knowledge of the Father, < https://youtu.be/H5zXP2tsFP0?is=BwGJBHedi1W0am_t> Ronald H. Nash takes divine illumination to include both natural and spiritual knowledge. See his book, *The Word of God and the Mind of Man* (Philipsburg, P&R, 1982).

apply in all covenants.⁷ Yet we look to Christ and his apostles teachings to rightly know, interpret and apply any commandments in the New Covenant.⁸

law: word or teaching

The Psalmist prays God enlighten and empower him to know and obey the beautiful things in His Word.

The Apostle Paul prays the same for the Ephesians

Eph. 1:16-17

16 I do not cease to give thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers;

17 that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of him

18 having the eyes of your hearts enlightened that you may know what is the hope to which he has called you

Anglican Preacher Charles Bridges comments, “In order to keep God's word, must we not pray to understand it? What then is the prayer? Not-give me a plainer Bible-but open my eyes to know my Bible. Not-show me some new revelations beside the law—but make me behold the wonders of the law.⁹

⁷ Thomas R. Schreiner, 40 Questions about Christians and Biblical Law (Grand Rapids, Kregel Academic, 2010) 77-80.

⁸ John G Reisinger, Tablets of Stone (Fredrick, New Covenant Media, 2004)58-59.

⁹ Charles Bridges, An Exposition of Psalm 119, p41-42. < https://www.grace-ebooks.com/library/Charles Bridges/CBr_Exposition of Psalm 119.pdf>

19 I am a sojourner on the earth; hide not your commandments from me.

(V19) I am a sojourner: exile, foreigner, or alien on a foreign land. This verse is why some argue the Psalmist is likely Daniel during the Babylonian captivity.

Do you see yourself as an stranger or exile in this lost and dying world longing for your home with God in the new heavens and new earth? Looking forward to what Augustine calls the City of God while temporarily residing in the City of Man.

(V19) hide not your commandments from me

The Psalmist in the prior verse requests God in the positive to open his eyes to God's truth. In this verse, he asks God in the negative to open his eyes by not allowing God's commandments to be hidden or concealed from him.

Charles H. Spurgeon observes, "if the the heavenly things that grant us peace are hidden from our eyes, we will find ourselves in a troubling situation; in fact, we would be out to sea without a compass, in a desert without a guide, and in an enemy's country without a friend."¹⁰

hide not

At times God may feel hidden to us. Not because God has failed to make Himself known. God has sufficiently revealed Himself through creation, conscience and the canon of

¹⁰ Charles H. Spurgeon, The Golden Alphabet (Abbotsford, Aneko Press, 2018)p44.

Scripture. God feels hidden often due to human sin, divine punishment, or soul-building.¹¹ Soul-building/Character-building: God produces in us virtue (e.g, faith, love, humility) through the fires of adversity.

1 Peter 1:6-7

**6 In this you rejoice, though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been grieved by various trials,
7 so that the tested genuineness of your faith—more precious than gold that perishes though it is tested by fire —may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus**

20 My soul is consumed with longing for your rules at all times.

The Psalmists heart-ached in longing for what he desired. He extensively and intensively desired God's Word of wise rules and judgements. Knowledge of God in His Word is an incommensurable good that outweighs any suffering or strife we may face.¹² E.g., lover and the beloved; knower and the known.

Do you long to know God better from His Word? Do you settle for milk or do you long for the meat—the deep things of God's Word?

III. How God Deals with the Arrogant

¹¹ I think this term soul-building comes from John Hick.

¹² William Lane Craig makes this point. < <https://www.reasonablefaith.org/podcasts/defenders-podcast-series-3/s3-excursus-on-natural-theology/excursus-on-natural-theology-part-34>>

21 You rebuke the insolent, accursed ones, who wander from your commandments.

God corrects or destroys the arrogant or prideful who wander from God's Word.

Arrogance or pride is arguably the root cause of all sin. To think you know better or more than God. Perhaps you have heard a non-Christian say he could have done a better job creating than God? Or worse, a professing Christian, like Pastor Gregory Boyd or Philosopher Randal Rouser, say God would never allow the destruction of the Canaanites so there must be errors in God's Word. Pride can come from the Irreligious or Religious.¹³ The Irreligious think they know better than God in their willful unbelief. So they live in self-deception openly in rebellion against God. Whereas the religious gradually began to think they must protect God or know better than God. It is a subtle shift where we want God to submit to our intuitions or reasoning than have our intuitions and reasoning submitted to God's Word. It is pure arrogance to think you know better or more than God. Do you put your intuitions, thoughts, reasoning or feelings above Scripture? May your pride be shattered by properly understanding the teachings of God's Word, namely the greatness of God, the supremacy of Scripture, the sinfulness of man and the substitutionary atonement of God's Son.

IV. Request for Deliverance from Persecution

¹³ I have adapted this from Tim Keller's book *The Prodigal God*. Pastor Brian Borgman says something similar.

22 Take away from me scorn and contempt, for I have kept your testimonies.

(V22) Take away from me: roll it from me¹⁴

Calvin interprets this verse as saying, “O God, permit not the ungodly to mock me for endeavoring to keep thy law.”¹⁵

The Psalmist petitions God to deliver or remove the shame, slander, dishonor, ridicule or contempt cast upon him due to his faithfulness to God’s Word.

Christians will face slander and persecution. Since the world persecuted our Lord they will persecute us. May we rejoice as we share in the sufferings and persecutions of our Lord. May the pressures and persecution not incapacitate or impair us from trusting and obeying God.

(V22) I have kept your testimonies: faithfulness to God’s Word

The Psalmist provides the reason he encounters persecution because he is faithful to God’s Word.

Is your affection and direction in life to be faithful to God’s Word? (E.g., Hot or Lukewarm; Rev. 3:15-16)

¹⁴ John Gill, Exposition of the Whole Bible < <https://biblehub.com/commentaries/gill/psalms/119.htm> >

¹⁵ John Calvin, Commentary on the Book of Psalms, Trans. Rev. James Anderson, Vol. 4(Grand Rapids, Baker, 2005)p416.

23 Even though princes sit plotting against me, your servant will meditate on your statutes.

(V23) Even though princes sit plotting against me

The context may refer to the Princes of King Saul's court plotting against David (1 Sam. 29:4) or the Satraps of King Darius's court plotting against Daniel (Dan. 6:1-5).

Persecution from worldly powers or influencers. If those in high authority will persecute how much more will those without authority persecute.

(V23) your servant will meditate on your statutes.

Your servant will remain faithful to meditate or study your Word. Persecution will not discourage or divert me from your Word.

V. Declaration of Confidence in God's Word

24 Your testimonies are my delight; they are my counselor.

(V24) Your testimonies: God's Word

(V24) are my delight: The Psalmists complete confidence, joy and satisfaction is in God's Word.

God's Word is the source, standard and support for our confidence, joy and satisfaction.

(V24) my counselor: The Psalmists confidence is in God's Word as the source for wisdom, guidance and direction for life.

The Main Idea: God's Word provides wisdom, guidance and delight for Christians amidst the suffering, sin and strife of this fallen world.