

Clinging to the Value of God's Word

Culture of Grace: Practices & Habits of GracePoint Church / Psalm 119 / December 31, 2023

Introduction:

Every new year, we will begin the year by focusing on habits and practices we should prioritize as part of our "Culture of Grace" series. We call this "Culture of Grace" because these habits and practices are means of God's grace. They are channels in which God has designed for His grace to flow into our lives, and the goal is to build the culture of GracePoint Church around God's means of grace. Over the next three weeks, we will consider God's word, prayer, and worship to propel us into the new year with a renewed focus on having these habits and practices shape the culture of our church. Our focus today is on the Word of God and the goal of being a people who are clinging to the value of God's Word. Our passage is Psalm 119 which stands almost at the middle of scripture proclaiming the immeasurable worth of God's Word as we heard from the verses read earlier. This psalm is a masterfully crafted acrostic poem with twenty-two eight-stanza strophes composed around each letter of the Hebrew alphabet. Its central focus is the "Torah" or "law of the Lord" which is best understood not as just the laws of God, or the five books of Moses, but as the entirety of God's teaching and instruction. On this structure and focus, Mark Futato says, "This alphabetic acrostic form serves to underscore the completeness of the celebration of the Lord's torah, the perfection of that torah (see 119:96), and its comprehensive wisdom that is applicable to all of life (see 119:98-100)" (Mark D. Futato, "The Book of Psalms," in Cornerstone Biblical Commentary, Vol 7: The Book of Psalms, The Book of Proverbs, 372). Throughout this rich psalm, eight synonyms for God's word are consistently employed, with occasional additions. Each term most often translated "law," "testimonies," "precepts," "statutes," "commandments," "rules," "word," and "promise," along with the occasional additions, contribute to a robust understanding of how the Lord communicates to His people. Many rightfully see this psalm as a companion to Psalm 1 and Psalm 19 as it reveals the meditations of one whose delight is the law of the Lord and has seen it powerfully work in his life. It speaks to us through the personal claims of the psalmist, and those claims beckon us to ask if we have embraced the value of God's Word like the psalmist has. To help us move deeper in our delight, I want to survey this psalm today by consider five benefits of God's Word I see it presenting to us. The first benefit I see is how,

God's Word Helps Us Seek God

Some wrongfully suggest the psalmist makes the Word of God an idol, but a closer look reveals his focus on the Word is due to Who it reveals and draws us to. Look at verses 1-3, "Blessed are those whose way is blameless, who walk in the law of the Lord! Blessed are those who keep his testimonies, who seek him with their whole heart, who also do no wrong, but walk in his ways!" The psalmist speaks of the happiest of happinesses coming from walking rightly. However, we discover this right way of walking is deeply connected to the Lord. Those who are blameless walk "in the law of the Lord...keep his testimonies," and, "walk in his ways." Every time the Word of God is emphasized in this psalm it is connected to God with possessive pronouns. Church, God's Word is valuable because it is His communication to us. We are to walk in His law, His testimonies, His ways, His Word. Now, look at the second line of verse 2 which says, "who seek Him with their whole heart." This enhances the first line, showing that keeping his testimonies is a way to seek the Lord. Throughout Psalm 119, the psalmist reveals his attention to God's Word helps him seek God by revealing who God is, how He works, and what He promises to do for those who seek Him. Notice how he consistently connects God's Word to what he has come to know about God. In verse 41, he says, "Let your steadfast love come to me, O Lord, your salvation according to your promise." His desire for the steadfast love of God comes from discovering it is part of God's promise. In verse 57, he says, "The Lord is my portion; I promise to keep your words." Portion is a term consistently used in the book of Joshua to refer to the inherited land allotments for the tribes of Israel, connecting directly to the Levites inheritance, which was not land but the Lord Himself.

The psalmist's desire of the Lord as his inheritance is what leads him to keep God's words. In verse 73 he says, "Your hands have made and fashioned me; give me understanding that I may learn your commandments." Knowing the personal creative work of God is what leads him to request understanding to learn the Lord's commandments. In verses 89-91 he says, "Forever, O Lord, your word is firmly fixed in the heavens. Your faithfulness endures to all generations; you have established the earth, and it stands fast. By your appointment they stand this day, for all things are your servants." The psalmist proclaims his awareness of the permanent nature of God's Word and faithfulness, and how all things work as His servants. We could continue. In verse 114 he hopes in God's Word because God is his hiding place and shield. In verses 137-138, he knows God is righteous, his rules are right, and He has set His testimonies in righteousness and faithfulness. So, he says in verse 144, "give me understanding that I may live." Consider more. In verse 149 he knows God will hear him. In 156, he understands the greatness of God's mercy. In 160, he sees all of God's word is truth and everlasting. All of this has come from his time spent in the Word of God, leading him to seek the one true God able to satisfy his soul. Church, like the psalmist, embracing God's Word will lead you to understand who He is, how He works, and what He promises for those who seek him. Cling to His Word in 2024 and have it help you seek God. The second benefit I see is how,

God's Word Leads Us to Proper Praise

The psalmist speaks often of praising God and how God's Word has helped him or will help him in that praise. Look at verse 7, "I will praise you with an upright heart, when I learn your righteous rules." We should long to praise God rightly, and God has revealed how to do this. In Matthew 15:7-9, Jesus proclaimed that worship is in vain if it doesn't come from a right heart. Notice how the psalmist is able to praise God with an upright heart. It comes when he learns of God's righteous rules. As the psalmist speaks of God's Word in Psalm 119, he shows us how it has impacted his praise by filling his heart with words to sing, providing reasons to praise, and helping him in his praise. In verse 54, the psalmist says, "Your statutes have been my songs in the house of my sojourning." God's Word became his songs. In verses 62 and 164, he tells us the righteous rules of God are reasons for his consistent praise. In verses 171-172, he says, "My lips will pour forth praise, for you teach me your statutes. My tongue will sing of your word, for all your commandments are right." Because God teaches him His statutes and all God's commandments are right, his lips will pour forth praise and his tongue will sing of God's Word. One commentator suggests the expressions pour forth and sing point to both personal and corporate praise (Derek Kidner, Psalms 73-150: An Introduction and Commentary, 465). His praise both personally and corporately comes from understanding the goodness of the instruction of the Lord. Then, in verse 175, the psalmist says, "Let my soul live and praise you, and let your rules help me." Do you see the longing of his heart? He wants to live and praise God, and he understands the rules, or Word of God is designed to help him in that endeavor. Church, like the psalmist, embracing God's Word will fill your heart with songs, give you reasons to praise, and help you in your praise. Cling to His Word in 2024 and have it lead you to proper praise. The third benefit I see is how,

God's Word Guards Us from Sin's Deceit

We quickly see the psalmist's concern with being kept from sin, as the second stanza contemplates an important truth. Look at verses 9-11, "How can a young man keep his way pure? By guarding it according to your word. With my whole heart I seek you; let me not wander from your commandments! I have stored up your word in my heart, that I might not sin against you." The young man may be the psalmist himself, but this truth applies to more than just young men. Purity in the way we should walk comes by guarding our steps according to God's Word and, in verse 11, we see this means storing the Word in our hearts. As it is stored in our hearts it helps us to not wander from God's commandments and not sin against Him. Church, our success, or lack thereof, in battles with sin and temptation can be directly correlated to how God's Word is stored in our heart.

This is because God's word is a channel in which His grace flows into our lives and His grace, as Titus 2:11-13 says, seeks to train us in renouncing ungodliness and live godly lives, purifying us as a people who are zealous to do good works. In this psalm, the psalmist shows it guards from sin's deceit by pointing his mind and heart towards what is right, revealing the selfish and worthless pursuit of sinful things, and helping to keep sin from ruling his life. In verses 36-37, he says, "Incline my heart to your testimonies, and not to selfish gain! Turn my eyes from looking at worthless things; and give me life in your ways." As his heart is inclined to the testimonies of God, it will not seek selfish gain. As he is given life from the ways of God, his eyes will turn away from looking at worthless things. Clinging to the faithful and true witness of God's Word helps us see the foolishness of pride and worthless nature of sinful things, leading us to despise those things. This is what he reveals in verse 104 and 128, showing us how God's precepts move him to hate every false way. Then, in verses 163, he shows his love for God's law leads to hating falsehood. God's Word set his spiritual taste buds. Finally, in verse 133, he says, "Keep steady my steps according to your promise, and let no iniquity get dominion over me." The promise of God sets our hearts on remaining faithful to God and guards our steps as we seek to walk in His ways. And we learn His promises from His Word. Church, like the psalmist, embracing God's word will point you toward what is right, reveal worthless pursuits, and keep sin from ruling your life. Cling to His Word in 2024 and let it guard you from sin's deceit. The fourth benefit I see is how,

God's Word Gives Us Wisdom and Understanding

The psalmist repeatedly points to God's Word bringing wisdom and understand, and repeatedly asks God for wisdom and instruction. Look at verse 24 with me, "Your testimonies are my delight; they are my counselors." Church, the Word of God will always be a better counselor than the opinions of men. Notice how he describes the wisdom and understanding God's Word brings in verses 98-100, "Your commandment makes me wiser than my enemies, for it is ever with me. I have more understanding than all my teachers, for your testimonies are my meditation. I understand more than the aged, for I keep your precepts." The Word of God gives him more wisdom and understand than his enemies, all his teachers, and even those who lived long lives full of experiences. Meditating on God's testimonies and keeping His precepts will always outweigh the counsel of man, even if man's counsel is steeped in years of experience. This is not intended to devalue experience and wisdom gained in life, but to rightfully elevate the wisdom and counsel of God's Word. As the psalmist speaks of God's word in Psalm 119, he shows it gives this wisdom by guides his steps and imparts understanding to all who need it. In verses 105-106 the psalmist says, "Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path. I have sworn and oath and confirmed it, to keep your righteous rules." God's Word guides him along the right path, leading him to strive to keep God's righteous rules. In verse 130, he says, "The unfolding of your words gives light; it imparts understanding to the simple." God's Word provides wisdom and understanding to those who don't have it. Yet, the psalmist understood it only does so through the help of God, so the Word also leads him to ask for God's help in verses 66 and 169 saying, "Teach me good judgment and knowledge," and, "give me understanding according to your word!" The plea "give me understanding" in verses 169 is found in verses 34, 73, 125, 144, and here in 169. Each use before verse 169 is connected to the purpose of his request, and here it ends by showing that understanding comes according to God's Word. Church, like the psalmist, embracing God's Word will guide your steps and bring understanding. Cling to His Word in 2024 and have it give you wisdom and understanding. The final benefit I want to highlight is how,

God's Word Comforts us in Affliction

Psalm 119 is hard to identify as a specific type of psalm, but it connects very closely with psalms of lament, and it sings of the ability of God's Word to comfort in our laments. Though they don't speak directly of affliction, notice the tone of verses 25-28, "My soul clings to the dust; give me life according to your word! When I told of my way, you answered me; teach me your statutes!

Make me understand the way of your precepts, and I will meditate on your wondrous works. My soul melts away for sorrow; strengthen me according to your word!" The psalmist speaks of his soul clinging to dust, which is a metaphor for death. He also speaks of it melting away for sorrow. Look at the way he describes his state. Have you ever felt like this? Yet, in that sorrow, he knows the way to be strengthened is not through the distractions of the world but the Word of God. The phrase "give me life" is a common refrain for him, meaning "revive me." It is almost always used in relation to these depths of sorrow and affliction. The psalmist knows God's Word is what will revive him as he is taught God's statutes and meditates on His works through His precepts. He reveals this is his comfort in verses 50-52, saying, "This is my comfort in my affliction, that your promise gives me life. The insolent utterly deride me, but I do not turn away from your law. When I think of your rules from of old, I take comfort, O Lord." The promise of God revives him in his affliction, and its long-standing truth brings comfort when he is mocked and insulted. As the psalmist speaks of this comfort throughout Psalm 119, he shows it reveals security in God's grace, provides peace to keep all from stumbling, and reminds him of God's steadfast love. After speaking of the fixed and firmly established Word of God in verses 89-91, the psalmist says, in verse 92, "If your law had not been my delight, I would have perished in my affliction." Then, in verse 165, he shows how God's Word keeps all from stumbling because of the peace it provides, saying, "Great peace have those who love your law; nothing can make them stumble." Do you long for peace? Listen to this promise, nothing can make the one who loves God's Word stumble. What a promise! This is true because, in verse 76, we see that God's Word promises steadfast love that will always comfort His servants. Church, like the psalmist, embracing God's Word will show you the security of God's grace, provide you with peace to keep from stumbling, and remind you of God's promises steadfast love. Cling to His Word in 2024 and let it comfort you in afflictions.

Conclusion:

As we concluded our time together, we must consider how God's Word becomes a means of grace in our lives. As James Mays says, "The instruction comes from God, but it must become part of the servant of God. It must be gathered into the store of the heart, the mind and mentality with which one thinks and wills (v. 11). The heart itself must be converted from all else (v. 36)." (James Luther Mays, *Psalms, Interpretation, a Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching*, 385). The question is, how is the heart converted? Only through the saving work of Jesus Christ revealed through God's Word. Jesus tells the Jews in John 5:39, "You search the Scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life; and it is they that bear witness about me." The ultimate purpose of God's Word is to bear witness to Christ as the only way to true and everlasting life. This is why Paul tells Timothy to cling to the sacred writings, or scriptures, in 2 Timothy 3:15, that he says "are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus." God's Word is able to make us wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus because it all points to him. And the heart is converted as it sees the glory of Christ in the Word. We cling the written word because it reveals the eternal Word made flesh. We cling to it because it points our hearts to the One who gave His life for us, bearing the penalty for our sins on the cross. The One who reconciled His people to God, and through that reconciliation transforms their hearts to see and desire God as that which is infinitely valuable. As the worship team is coming to lead us in a time of response, our application is clear, cling to the value of God's Word. Delight in it, study its depth, meditate on it, and love it. So, you can say with the psalmist in verse 97, "Oh how I love your law! It is my meditation all the day." Embrace God's Word and let it help you seek God, lead you to proper praise, guard you from sin's deceit, give you wisdom and understanding, and comfort you in affliction. As you respond, you are welcome to sit and reflect or stand and sing as you are led. You can also come kneel at the front as you cry out to God or come to receive prayer from a member of our prayer team who will be worshipping on the front rows or at the bottom of the stairs in the back. Let's seek God's grace this morning.