

Psalm 119:89-96 (LAMED)

Confidence in God's Word

For ever, O LORD, thy word is settled in heaven... v. 89

In our studies of the 119th Psalm we have seen most clearly that the word of God is the subject of this Psalm. In this Psalm more than anywhere else in the Bible you learn the doctrine of the Bible – i.e. you learn what the Bible has to say about itself. So far we have seen the Bible from a number of different perspectives. We have studied, for example, the use we are to make of God's word; We've considered our obligation to take heed to God's word; Communicating God's word; Remembering God's word; We've also considered the primary purpose behind God's word which is to lead us to God himself. The Bible is not an end in itself, it is a means to an end, that end being to lead us to God and to Christ as well as direct us in our duty to Christ.

The section of the Psalm we are considering this morning stands out in a unique way in that it begins theologically rather than practically. The focus is still on the word of God but now we're directed to the security of that word and the durability of that word. Notice what it says in v. 89 *For ever, O LORD, thy word is settled in heaven.* This is followed with a theological statement in v. 90 that pertains to God being the creator and sustainer of the universe. *Thy faithfulness is unto all generations: Thou hast established the earth, and it abideth.* And then in v. 91 we find a statement that pertains to the absolute sovereignty of God over the universe and everything within the universe. So we read *They continue this day according to thine ordinances: for all are thy servants.* The word *they* is referring to everything that falls under the realm of God's creation and providential rule. *They continue this according to thine ordinances: for all are thy servants.*

These theological statements about God serve a specific purpose with regard to the word of God. They call our attention to another important factor regarding God's word and that is the confidence we can have in God's word. Critics of the Bible take it upon themselves to undermine our confidence in the word of God. I can remember the summer when I got saved and shared Christ with others around me. I'm sure I've shared with you that I was in a Drum and Bugle corp the summer I was saved and being in the Drum and Bugle Corp meant long bus rides. And it was during those bus rides that I and another good friend of mine would share our faith. And I never have forgotten that one of the first responses I received to sharing my faith was the notion put forward by others that the Bible was not a book that could be trusted and in order to prove this notion to us a couple of Bible skeptics proceeded to search the Bible with the aim of demonstrating to me and to my friend that there were contradictions in the Bible and therefore the Bible was not a book to be trusted.

When I think back on that event today I actually do so with at least a little respect for those guys that read and studied the Scriptures in search of contradictions. At least they actually set out to find some contradictions. It has been my experience that many Bible critics have never set out to find these so called contradictions. They've never read the Bible at all. They're simply saying that there are contradictions in it because they heard

someone else who in turn referred to yet someone else that said there were contradictions in it. They consider the matter to be an issue of general knowledge which is tantamount to saying – everybody knows that there are contradictions in the Bible. It's common knowledge. What is not nearly as common as this so-called common knowledge are those that actually look for the imagined contradictions.

Searching for contradictions is a dangerous enterprise to embark upon. If a critic isn't careful he's liable to discover that the Bible is completely trustworthy and that things that are taken to be contradictions more often than not have very simple explanations to resolve what may appear on the surface to be a contradiction.

At any rate – it doesn't take long for a Christian, even a Christian who is new in the faith to discover that the Bible has been and continues to be a book that draws constant criticism by skeptics and unbelievers. And this does make it necessary for the Christian to know that the Bible is a book that he can trust – a book that deserves his confidence. Behind the attacks on the Bible's trustworthiness, you see, are the spiritual attacks that come from the unseen forces of spiritual darkness. Nobody knows better than the devil that the most effective way to pull the rug out of a Christian's testimony and a Christian's usefulness is to undermine that Christian's confidence in God's word. It has been the ploy of the devil ever since he lured Adam and Eve into sin to raise the question *hast God said?*

Seeing the importance of such confidence, then, I'd like you to think with me on the theme of:

The Christian's Confidence in God's Word

Think with me first of all on:

I. The Contributing Factors to the Christian's Confidence

There are objective factors as well as a subjective factor that contributes to the confidence that the Christian has in God's word. You may be familiar with some of those objective factors that set forth by Christian apologists.

Josh McDowell use to travel to various secular colleges and universities and present his case for the veracity of the Bible as well as the veracity of Jesus Christ. I remember attending one of his lectures many years ago and found it interesting that none of the scholarly professors of that university showed up to try to challenge his claims even though Josh McDowell invited them and challenged them to refute his evidence.

He has two volumes entitled "Evidence that demands a Verdict" and a second volume called "More Evidence that demands a Verdict." I recommend his books. They certainly will inspire your confidence in God's word. I find especially fascinating his section on the uniqueness of the Bible.

He points out that unlike any other book the Bible was written over a 1600 year span which is the equivalent of about 60 generations. It was written by 40 plus authors from

very diverse backgrounds in which you find kings, peasants, fishermen, poets, statesmen etc. He notes that the Bible was written in different places – spanning three continents. It was written in 3 different languages – Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek and the marvel of this diversity is that in spite of different times and places and authors the Bible, nevertheless, speaks with complete unity on a score of controversial subjects. There is one unfolding story, a theologian notes, and that is the story of God’s redemption of fallen man.

McDowell then goes on to share a story of how he was approached by a representative of *The Great Books of the Western World*. This representative was trying to recruit salesmen to sell these great books. McDowell writes: *I challenged him to take just 10 of the authors, all from one walk of life, one generation, one place, one time, one mood, one continent, one language and just one controversial subject. Then I asked him: “Would they agree?” He paused and then replied “no.” A couple of days later he committed his life to Christ due to the uniqueness and trustworthiness of the Bible.*

These kinds of stories can be told many times over and they make for interesting reading. There is, however, one potential danger to this kind of approach to defending the Bible. In the beginning of his section on the trustworthiness of the Bible Josh McDowell states *The purpose of this section is to build a working confidence in the Word of God. The Bible is reliable and will stand up under a thorough examination.* While this statement is true, it should nevertheless be noted (and this to me is another confidence building factor in the Bible) it does not present itself to men for man’s scrutiny or approval. It asserts itself over man by setting forth its own authority. You find this authoritative claim every time you read the familiar phrase *Thus saith the LORD*.

It is more in keeping with this authority that we find the Psalmist presenting to us the reliability of the Bible. *Forever, O LORD, thy word is settled in heaven.* Do you notice how the Psalmist is appealing to a higher court and a higher authority than the authority of mere men, even scholarly Christian men. It is in heaven that the word of the LORD is settled. It is before the highest court of the universe that the word of the LORD is settled or *firmly fixed* as another English translation puts it.

The Psalmist goes on to note that God’s faithfulness is unto all generations. And as the evidence, so to speak, of God’s immutable faithfulness the Psalmist points out that God has established the earth and that it is by God’s word that the earth abides. I like the way this truth is expressed in Heb. 1:3 where reference is made to Christ who upholds all things by the word of his power.

Here then is the time-tested evidence that God’s word is true, that God’s word is settled. This world – indeed this universe and all that is in it continues up to this day according to God’s ordinances. *They continue this day* the Psalmist writes in v. 91 *for all are thy servants.* Do you see the Psalmist’s meaning? Everything in this universe falls under the sovereign rule of God. The laws of nature are God’s laws. The continuity of this world that is so taken for granted even among rebels against God bears witness to the truth that it is God’s word that upholds all things.

Listen to the words of a commentator cited by Spurgeon on this verse: *Wilful man may dare to defy his Maker, and set at nought his wise and merciful commands; but not so all nature besides. Well, indeed, is it for us that his other works have not erred after the pattern of our rebellion; that seed time and harvest, cold and heat, summer and winter, day and night, with all their accompanying provision, have not ceased! To the precepts imposed upon vegetation when first called into being on creation's third day, it still yields implicit submission, and the most tender plant will die rather than transgress. What an awful contrast to this is the conduct of man, God's noblest work, endowed with reason and a never dying soul, yet too often ruining his health, wasting and destroying his mental power, defiling his immortal spirit, and, in a word, madly endeavouring to frustrate every purpose for which he was framed.*

Listen to these words from the great Puritan Stephen Charnock: *All creatures punctually observe the law he hath implanted on their nature, and in their several capacities acknowledge him their sovereign; they move according to the inclinations he imprinted on them. The sea contains itself in its bounds, and the sun steps not out of his sphere; the stars march in their order: "They continue this day according to thine ordinances: for all are thy servants." If he orders things contrary to their primitive nature they obey him. When he speaks the word, the devouring fire becomes gentle, and toucheth not the hair of the children he will preserve; the hunger starved lions suspend their ravenous nature when so good a morsel as Daniel is set before them; and the sun, which had been in perpetual motion since its creation, obeys the writ of ease God sent in Joshua's time, and stands still.*

Here, then, is the confidence we can have in God's word – we see throughout the history of Creation that all things abide by his word. He has the entire history of civilization to bear testimony to the truth that all things are upheld by his word. These are the objective factors that contribute to our confidence.

You know as well as I know, however, that in his stubborn rebellion man will continue to buck against God's word. So Paul tells us in 1Cor. 2:14 *But the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned.*

So long as man remains at enmity with God he will never yield to obvious evidence. This is something to keep in mind when you witness to others. It's not a bad thing to present obvious evidence to those that are lost, but keep in mind that in order to affirm that evidence they need their hearts to be wrought upon. The Psalmist brings our attention to the way he was wrought upon in v. 93 *I will never forget thy precepts: for with them thou hast quickened me.*

This must ever be our aim and hope when we present the word of God and when we cite evidence for the veracity of the word of God. A sinner needs more than a convincing argument. He'll still fly in the face of a convincing argument. What he needs is the same thing every Christian has experienced who affirms the truth of God's word – he needs to experience the quickening, or life-giving power of that word.

So we see the factors that contribute to our confidence – God’s character, his faithfulness, his sovereignty as well as the subjective factor that bolsters our confidence – we have been quickened by God’s word. Would you consider with me next:

II. The Christian’s Need for Confidence in God’s Word

It’s interesting to note that following the verses that show us the contributing factors to the Psalmist’s confidence he goes on to say in v. 92 *Unless thy law had been my delights, I should then have perished in mine affliction.*

Spurgeon captures the meaning of this verse in its context when he writes: *That word which has preserved the heavens and the earth also preserves the people of God in their time of trial. With that word we are charmed; it is a mine of delight to us. We take a double and treble delight in it, and derive a multiplied delight from it, and this stands us in good stead when all other delights are taken from us. We should have felt ready to lie down and die of our griefs if the spiritual comforts of God’s word had not uplifted us; but by their sustaining influence we have been borne above all the depressions and despairs which naturally grow out of severe affliction.*

You may recall that earlier in our studies of this Psalm I passed on to you the view of some commentators that this Psalm was written over a long period of David’s life – the earlier sections being written when David was young and the later sections being written when David was older. That indeed may be the way this Psalm was composed but whether it was or not it’s easy to see that this section of the Psalm easily corresponds to that period in David’s life when he had to flee from Saul and eventually take refuge in the land of the Philistines. Notice the words of v. 95 *The wicked have waited for me to destroy me: but I will consider thy testimonies.*

Here would have been a man, then, that had in effect lost everything. He was chased away from his inheritance. He was forced to leave the land of promise as well as his familiar surroundings and friends. He had to be constantly on his guard and he was made to live in exile and was often times on the run but still his confidence in God’s word remained intact.

Does his life not demonstrate to us our need of having confidence in God’s word especially during those times that we must painfully face the reality that there is nothing else that we can have confidence in?

Again the words of Spurgeon: *Some of us can set our seal to this statement. Our affliction, if it had not been for divine grace, would have crushed us out of existence, so that we should have perished. In our darkest seasons nothing has kept us from desperation but the promise of the Lord: yea, at times nothing has stood between us and self destruction save faith in the eternal word of God. When worn with pain until the brain has become dazed and the reason well nigh extinguished, a sweet text has whispered to us its heart cheering assurance, and our poor struggling mind has reposed upon the bosom of*

God. That which was our delight in prosperity has been our light in adversity; that which in the day kept us from presuming has in the night kept us from perishing.

In my Bible Psalm 27 is entitled *David's song of confidence*. In v. 13 of that Psalm David writes *I had fainted, unless I had believed to see the goodness of the LORD in the land of the living*. It goes without saying, of course, that in order for God's word to function as a source of consolation in our afflictions we must have confidence in that word. If the devil can destroy that confidence he can increase our vulnerability to perishing in our affliction as we cave in to despair.

Now look with me at v. 96 for this verse also shows us our need for confidence in God's word: *I have seen an end of all perfection: but thy commandment is exceeding broad*. This verse may be better understood by the translations which read: *I have seen a limit to all perfection, but your commandment is exceedingly broad*.

The perfection in view here is that which is limited to men. Spurgeon is again helpful here when he writes: *The experienced believer has seen an end of all perfection in himself, in his brethren, in the best man's best works. It would be well if some who profess to be perfect could even see the beginning of perfection, for we fear they cannot have begun aright, or they would not talk so exceeding proudly. Is it not the beginning of perfection to lament your imperfection? There is no such thing as perfection in anything which is the work of man.*

And yet – if the believer doesn't have confidence in God's word then he's left to a sense of his own self-sufficiency. This is the world's religion and the world's self-delusion. In contrast to this delusion we go on to read in v. 96 that the Lord's commandment is exceeding broad. I've been drawing from Spurgeon a lot in this point. Let me quote him again: *When the breadth of the law is known the notion of perfection in the flesh vanishes: that law touches every act, word, and thought, and is of such a spiritual nature that it judges the motives, desires, and emotions of the soul. It reveals a perfection which convicts us for shortcomings as well as for transgressions, and does not allow us to make up for deficiencies in one direction by special carefulness in others. The divine ideal of holiness is far too broad for us to hope to cover all its wide arena, and yet it is no broader than it ought to be. Who would wish to have an imperfect law? Nay, its perfection is its glory; but it is the death of all glorying in our own perfection.*

But while the law strips us of self-sufficiency it also leads us to confidence in an all sufficient Savior. The love of Christ, you see, is very broad as well as long and high and deep. And this leads to my last point this morning. We've seen the factors that contribute to the Christian's confidence in God's word as well as his need for that confidence. Think with me finally on:

II. The Benefits to the Christian's Confidence in God's Word

For ever, O LORD, thy word is settled in heaven. The word *settled* mean firmly fixed. And if God's word is firmly fixed then everything we associate with that word is also

firmly fixed – which means quite simply that the promises of God that pertain to salvation are firmly fixed. The promise of forgiveness of sins is settled or firmly fixed. The promise of a perfect righteousness outside our own is settled.

In our court system here on earth matters can be appealed and overturned until they reach the Supreme Court. And even decisions at the Supreme Court level can be nullified or changed through the proper procedures of legislation or constitutional amendment. The promise of heaven and everlasting life is settled in a court that is much more supreme than any earthly court. These matters are settled in the court from which there is no higher appeal and the settling of issues before this court cannot be legislated against or amended.

Aren't you glad that God's word is forever settled in heaven? It's settled in a place where it is preserved and secure. Moths and rust cannot corrupt it; thieves cannot break in to steal it. And because God's word is settled in heaven the benefit we gain from it is that we can be settled in our hearts here on earth.

In Col. 1:23 Paul makes reference to continuing in the faith being grounded and settled so as to not be moved away from the hope of the gospel. And in the benediction to Peter's first epistle he writes in 1Pet. 5:10 *But the God of all grace, who hath called us unto his eternal glory by Christ Jesus, after that ye have suffered a while, make you perfect, stablish, strengthen, settle you.*

To be settled is to be at peace – to be settled and established is to be stable. Here is one of the greatest blessings or benefits a man or woman or boy or girl can gain in a very unstable and unsettled world – we can be settled. What a timely blessing especially in the kind of world we find ourselves in today. We live in a day when everything seems to be coming unglued and nothing is settled. Our economy isn't settled – our job security isn't settled – our health and well-being is not settled – our politics is not settled. There is really nothing in this world to gain our confidence.

But in contrast to all that is very unsettling here is something that has been and is and will be for ever unshaken. *For ever, O LORD, thy word is settled in heaven.* So the Christian gains the benefit of stability by his confidence in God's word and he gains the benefit of stability because he gains the benefit of assurance.

It is confidence in God's word that enables the Psalmist to say in v. 94 *I am thine, save me; for I have sought thy precepts.* I wonder then this morning – do you have confidence in the word of God? We live in a time and in a culture when it's dangerous to have confidence in anything. There are so many things in this world to let you down and disappoint you when you place your confidence in them. God's word, on the other hand is for ever settled in heaven. Here is something that we can and should fully trust.

And if you find that trust lacking, it may be because you're not taking the time you need in God's word for your confidence to be strengthened. I believe that the petition in the Lord's prayer is as true spiritually as it is materially when he teaches us to pray *Give us this day our daily bread.*

Neglect of God's word sets you on course to lose confidence and lose hope in God's word. If his word is forever settled in heaven then we need to have that word daily ministered to our hearts in order to establish and maintain stability in our hearts. And stability in our hearts will lead to stability in our homes, stability in our church and even stability in our nation if our nation can be brought back to a heritage of trust and confidence in the word of God.

There is certainly every reason to trust God's word. God's faithfulness, after all, is unto all generations. It is our God who has established the earth and by whom it abides. I hope that you're trusting in his word. The evidence of that trust will be your own assurance and settledness. May the Lord grant, then, that each one here will be grounded and settled in the hope of the gospel and never be moved away from that hope. May the God of all grace make you perfect, stablish, strengthen, settle you – for your well being and for his glory.