

Psalm 119:113-120 (SAMECH)
Utilizing God's Word for Our Protection

Thou art my hiding place and my shield: I hope in thy word – v. 114

Back in the early days of the cold war between the Soviet Union and the United States bomb shelters or fallout shelters became somewhat popular. These were underground shelters that were designed to withstand a nuclear blast as well as provide protection for the radioactive fallout that would occur following such a blast.

Those were days that were lived in fear or at least they were lived in fear until one became acclimated to the mutual destruction policies that governed the arms race of that period. The strategy of that time was to have so much destructive capability that if our nation was struck first by nuclear bombs we would be able to respond by unleashing our own nuclear bombs on our attackers. The ability of each nation to destroy the other, thus became a restraining force to keep each nation from attacking the other. And that was the cultural and political reality of those days.

Some of you are old enough to recall those little triangles that use to appear on the face of the tuning dials on portable and car radios. Those triangles showed where you were to tune your radio in the event of an emergency.

Those fallout shelters pretty well died out with the downfall of the Soviet Union. I understand that some of the larger shelters have even been converted to museums. In more recent times, however, shelters again for a time became popular. You remember, I'm sure, the y2k scare that came over the whole world back at the turn of the century. Our world had become so dependent on computers that when we went from the 20th to the 21st century and the computer calendars were not equipped to handle the change, there were gloom and doom forecasts that predicted that great economic collapses were going to occur everywhere so shelters were once again built and stocked with enough food and water to hopefully withstand that catastrophe.

It seems, doesn't it, that protective shelters have been a vital part of contemporary history. When I had occasion to visit London England many years ago I remember being awed by the subway system in that city and the knowledge that during the bombing raids of World War II the inhabitants of London would make their way to those subway tunnels in order to find protection and shelter from those German bombing raids.

I find it ironic that with all the attention that's been given to protective shelters in the carnal realm people should be so oblivious to their need of protection in the spiritual realm. We're told in Jn. 3:36 that *He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life: and he that believeth not the Son shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth on him.* In close connection to this saying we also read in Rom. 2:5 that *after thy hardness and impenitent heart treasurest up unto thyself wrath against the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God.*

The book of Revelation provides us with a scene that does depict for us a coming day in which shelter will be sought from the wrath of God. So we read in Rev. 6:15-17 *And the kings of the earth, and the great men, and the rich men, and the chief captains, and the mighty men, and every bondman, and every free man, hid themselves in the dens and in the rocks of the mountains; And said to the mountains and rocks, Fall on us, and hide us from the face of him that sitteth on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb: For the great day of his wrath is come; and who shall be able to stand?*

The Christian also finds himself in need of shelter. He must bear the wrath of a Christ-rejecting and Christ-despising world. The book of Acts, the book Revelation and the book of church history makes that very clear. In addition to the world's animosity he is also targeted by the devil who, like a roaring lion, seeketh whom he may devour. Our time in this world is a time of spiritual warfare and *we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places* (Eph. 6:12).

And so we find ourselves in need in shelter and protection and provision. This need for protection is a point that stands out in this section of the 119th Psalm. So we read in v. 114 *Thou art my hiding place and my shield: I hope in thy word.* In the next verse our warfare is revealed by the Psalmist's exclamation *Depart from me, ye evildoers: for I will keep the commandments of my God.* And in v. 117 the idea of the safety of protection comes out again *Hold thou me up, and I shall be safe: and I will have respect unto thy statutes continually.*

The idea of being held up by the Lord and it's connection to the word of the Lord comes out plainly in v. 116 *Uphold me according unto thy word, that I may live.* And so we see yet again another function that is served by the word of God. It serves the function of providing the Christian's protection. In our spiritual warfare we don't need to retreat into some underground bomb shelter. This may be the view of those that espouse the monastic mentality that falsely tells you that you must live like an isolated monk and build walls around yourself to keep yourself hedged in and keep everybody else blocked out. Not only do we not think this way, but as we'll see in the course of this study that approach doesn't work.

What we do, rather, is find our refuge in the truth of God's word. We take shelter in God's promises. By faith in the promises of the gospel we, in effect, take the shield of faith and withstand the fiery darts of the devil. What I would like to do this morning, therefore, is to analyze this section of the 119th Psalm in the light of this theme of shelter or protection. And what I will do in this analysis is raise and then answer the question:

How Do We Utilize God's Word for Our Protection?

I. We Must Understand the Forces that are Against Us

This section of the Psalm reveals to us two sources from which these forces come – one from within and another from without. The one from within is the more subtle and very often the most dominating force. Notice what the beginning of v. 113 says: *I hate vain thoughts*. This is why I said a moment ago that it does no good for the Christian to shut himself into a monastery. You may get build walls that enable you to isolate yourself and isolate your family and you may get away from the world and you may get away from other people but you won't get away from yourself.

Your pride goes with you – your covetousness goes with you – your anger and bitterness goes with you – indeed your vain imagination may thrive when there's nothing to distract it. Thomas Manton breaks down this statement this way. He lists six things that contribute to sinful thoughts.

First is uncleanness – adultery is a common sin in our day but if adultery could be gauged by the Lord's standard which is a matter of the thoughts of the heart then we would have to say that adultery exists in epidemic proportions. And don't you men know that you are bombarded with that which contributes to adulterous thinking. You can't drive around I-465 without being attacked by that which would provoke adulterous thinking. I suppose when you think of how every conceivable form of media promotes promiscuity today the monastery may have some appeal.

But even apart from these external provocations Christ tells us Mt 15:19 that *out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies*. Such inbred sin should compel to cry – Lord, deliver me from myself. Please Lord keep restraints on these defiling thoughts that arise from within my heart and keep restraints on me lest sinful thoughts give rise to sinful actions.

The second thing Manton mentions that contributes to sinful or vain thoughts is vengeance. How many murders have you committed in your heart through vengeful thinking? Manton writes: *Liquors are soured when long kept; so, when we dwell upon discontents, they turn to revenge. Purposes of revenge are most sweet and pleasant to carnal nature*.

Next there's envy – *envy is a sin that feeds upon the mind*, Manton notes, *Those songs of the women, that Saul had slain his thousands, but David his ten thousands, they ran in Saul's mind, therefore he hated David (#1Sa 18:9). Envy is an evil disease that dwelleth in the heart, and betrays itself mostly in thoughts*.

The fourth thing he mentions is pride - *Either pride in the desires or pride in the mind, either vain glory or self conceit; this is entertaining our hearts with whispers of vanity*. Paul writes to the Corinthians that we are not *sufficient of ourselves to think any thing as of ourselves; but our sufficiency is of God* but in our carnal pride and vain imaginations we love to think that we are self-sufficient. Like Haman, in the book of Esther, we imagine that there is no one that God would delight to honor more than ourselves and there is no one more worthy of such honor than we ourselves.

The fifth thing Manton mentions is covetousness. Covetousness, which is nothing but vain musings and exercises of the heart: He then cites 2Pet. 2:14 "A heart they have exercised with covetous practices." He also notes how covetousness withdraws the heart in the very time of God's worship: "Their heart goeth after their covetousness" – Eze 33:31. And if you look up that reference in Ezekiel you'll discover that it's in the context of worship – people coming to Ezekiel to hear the word of the Lord.

Last but not least of the things mentioned by Manton there's distrust. It's no wonder, then, that the Psalmist says *I hate vain thoughts* – those thoughts encompass uncleanness, revenge, envy, pride, covetousness and distrust. And isn't it interesting that the very next verse in this section of the Psalm says *Thou art my hiding place and my shield*. I must find refuge from vain thinking and all that springs from vain thinking. I must be shielded from the things that arise from within. Indeed we must not only be shielded from them but we must overcome them.

Paul certainly captures this idea when he writes in 2Cor. 10:4,5 (*For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty through God to the pulling down of strong holds; Casting down imaginations, and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ.*)

This is the enemy or the force from within from which we need protection and shelter and victory. There is also an enemy without that is mentioned in v. 115 *Depart from me, ye evildoers: for I will keep the commandments of my God*. The Puritan George Swinnock makes an interesting observation about this statement: *It is difficult, even to a miracle, to keep God's commandments and evil company too; therefore when David would marry himself to God's commands, to love them, and live with them, for better or worse, all his days, he is forced to give a bill of divorce to wicked companions, knowing that otherwise the match could never be made.*

Before leaving this point I should point out from this section that underlying these internal and external forces from which the Christian needs protection we also find consideration given to that protection we need from God himself. This is what should lead a sinner to become a Christian.

Note the words in this section from vv. 118-120 *Thou hast trodden down all them that err from thy statutes: for their deceit is falsehood. Thou puttest away all the wicked of the earth like dross: therefore I love thy testimonies. My flesh trembleth for fear of thee; and I am afraid of thy judgments.*

A Christian may hate vain thoughts and he should call for evildoers to depart from him but there remains something even more dreadful from which he needs shelter and protection. You could say this precedes his hatred for vain thoughts and his call for evildoers to depart from him but he never should forget it and so he says in v. 120 *My flesh trembleth for fear of thee; and I am afraid of thy judgments.*

Here is what, above all else, we need protection from. We cannot stand before a holy God. Our righteousnesses are as filthy rags and the thought of judgment should make us

tremble for fear. But it should also drive us to Christ. And the remembrance of it should keep us coming to Christ until we're thoroughly grounded in the assurance that the issue of our judgment has already been settled by Christ. This leads to my next answer to the question of how we utilize the word of God for our protection. We've seen why we need protection and what we need to be protected from. Consider with me next:

II. We Must Make God Our Refuge

You can see in v. 114 that there's a close connection between making God our refuge and the word of God. Notice what that verse says: *Thou art my hiding place and my shield: I hope in thy word.*

Here, then, is where we must flee for protection and refuge from vain thoughts and vain men. This is a common theme in the Psalms. So we read in Ps 32:7 *Thou [art] my hiding place; thou shalt preserve me from trouble; thou shalt compass me about with songs of deliverance.* And in Ps. 91:1,2 *He that dwelleth in the secret place of the most High shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty. I will say of the LORD, He is my refuge and my fortress: my God; in him will I trust.*

An old Presbyterian from the time of the Puritans by the name of Ralph Robinson writes on how qualified Christ is to be the protector of his people. He lists 5 qualifications pertaining to Christ:

1. He has strength. Paper houses will never be good hiding places. Houses made of reeds or rotten timber will not be fit places for men to hide themselves in. Jesus Christ is a place of strength. He is the Rock of Ages: His name is "the Mighty God," #Isa 9:6.

2. He has height. Low houses are soon scaled. Jesus Christ is a high place; he is as high as heaven. He is the Jacob's ladder that reacheth from earth to heaven: #Ge 28:12. He is too high for men, too high for devils; no creature can scale these high walls.

3. He has secret places. Christ has many secret chambers that no creatures can ever find: #So 2:14, "O my dove, that art in the secret places of the stairs." As Christ has hidden comforts which no man knows but he that receives them; so he has hidden places of secrecy which none can find out but he that dwells in them. "Come, my people, enter into thy chambers, and shut the doors upon thee" (#Isa 26:20).

4. Christ is faithful. He that will hide others had need be very faithful. A false hearted protector is worse than an open pursuer. "Will the men of Keilah deliver me up?" saith David; "They will deliver thee up," saith the Lord. But now Christ is faithful: #Re 3:14, he is "the faithful witness"; he cannot be bribed to surrender up any creature that comes to hide himself with him.

5. Christ is diligent. Diligence is as necessary in those that will hide others, as faithfulness. A sleepy guard may betray a castle or garrison as well as a faithless guard. But Jesus Christ is very diligent and watchful. #Ps 121:3-4, "He that keepeth Israel neither slumbereth nor sleepeth."

Thomas Manton also remarks about the excellency of a shield when he writes: The excellency and properties of a shield lie in these things: — 1. In the largeness and breadth of it, in that it hides and covers the person that weareth it from all darts that are flung at him, so as they cannot reach him: Thou, Lord, wilt bless the righteous; with favour wilt thou compass him as with a shield (#Ps 5:12). 2. The excellence of a shield lies in that it is hard and impenetrable. So this answers to the invincible power of God's providence, by which he can break the assaults of all enemies; and such a shield is God .to his people: "My shield, and he in whom I trust" (#Ps 144:2).

What I want you to see before leaving this point is the connection between the Lord being our hiding place and our shield with the word of the Lord. It is, of course, through the word of the Lord that we learn of Christ being our hiding place and shield and it is in his word that we learn to appropriate these truths.

This ties into the truth that we've noted again and again in our study of this Psalm which is that the word of God is not simply a text book or a code of conduct manual. It's the means through which we commune with God – it's the means through which we gain assurance from God. It's the means through which we come to understand God's purpose of bringing glory to his name through the salvation of his people and when we understand that the basis of our hope for shelter and protection is grounded in the atoning work of Christ's death then we can affirm with confidence what the Psalmist affirms in Ps. 5:12 that the Lord will compass his people with favor as with a shield.

And if we are indeed compassed with God's favor on account of Christ's atoning death then there is no force from within or without that will gain dominion over us. We belong to Christ. He has a purpose which is to the praise and glory of his grace to protect and preserve us and see us safely through to heaven.

How do we utilize the word of God for our protection, then? We do so by recognizing the forces that are against us. We do by making God's word our hope and thus making God himself our refuge. Consider with me finally that:

III. We Must Seek God to Uphold Us

Notice the Psalmist's prayer in vv. 116,117 *Uphold me according unto thy word, that I may live: and let me not be ashamed of my hope. Hold thou me up, and I shall be safe: and I will have respect unto thy statutes continually.*

Uphold me – v. 116; Hold me up – v. 117. The words are different but the meanings are similar and they certainly present to us petitions we can relate to. How often do you feel yourself slipping? You are able to say with the Psalmist what he says in Ps 73:2 *But as for me, my feet were almost gone; my steps had well nigh slipped.* How often does it seem that vain thoughts and the powers of wickedness have all but killed your spiritual vitality? You languish in your praying and your walk with Christ becomes hard and becomes forced because of a lack of power on your part. You know that the Christian life cannot be lived in your own strength and Christ cannot be served in the power of your might.

You need a power outside yourself to uphold you – which can be translated literally to sustain you – and you need power beyond your own to hold you up which can also be translated to support you.

I noticed something very interesting about these verses that I must admit I had never seen before. Do you see how in v. 116 in close connection with the petition to be upheld is the statement that follows *that I may live*. Uphold me, Lord, so that I may live. My spiritual life, depends, oh Lord on being upheld by thy power. This is a verse that conveys to us the idea of spiritual vitality – living, in other words. In the past I've placed great emphasis on the need for Christians to know this vitality. We are not suppose to drag ourselves through life or drag ourselves to church. How often do we come to church that way. Sunday is the hardest day to get out of bed and Sunday seems to be the hardest day to wake up even when you're up. We sleepwalk to our cars and then drive to church half awake, half asleep and when you get to church your condition isn't any better. The greatest challenge to your worship is stifling the yawns that seem to rule over you.

What do you need? You need to be upheld by the Lord so that you may live and you may escape the doldrums of dead religion. So the matter of vitality is in v. 116. But now in the next verse we see the thing I want you to see that I just admitted I had never seen before. Notice the petition in v. 117 *Hold thou me up, and I shall be safe*.

Uphold me and I live – hold me up and I'm safe. And don't these two verses taken together indicate to you that a part of your protection is to be found in your spiritual vitality. If you are living, in other words – and by living, I'm now speaking of a close and real and intimate walk with Christ in which you speak to him in prayer and praise and he speaks to you in his word – if you are living in that fashion, then you are safe.

Spiritual vitality, you see, is not only the blessing you enjoy in walking with the Lord but it's also your protection from vain thoughts and vain men and the spiritual powers of wickedness against which you fight. It really makes the matter of a vital walk with Christ all that more important. If spiritual vitality pertained only to your sense of blessedness then maybe there would be times when you could make do without it. But these verses indicate to us that such vitality is not to be considered merely in the terms of the blessings that you gain from it but also in terms of the protection you gain.

Simply put – the way you utilize God's word for your protection is to see to it that through that word you're keeping close to Christ. This is why you must set your affection on that word and say with the Psalmist *thy law do I love – I hope in thy word – I will have respect unto thy statutes – I love thy testimonies*. We love that which brings us to God himself.

May the Lord, then, indeed uphold us that we may live and hold us up that we may be safe. In the way of knowing God's favor through Christ we will also know God's protection from all that would deaden and defile us and lure us away from Christ.