



## Delight in the Law of the LORD – Psalm 1

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### Psalm 1 [NASB]

- <sup>1</sup> How blessed is the man who does not walk in the counsel of the wicked,  
Nor stand in the path of sinners,  
Nor sit in the seat of scoffers!
- <sup>2</sup> But his delight is in the law of the LORD,  
And in His law he meditates day and night.
- <sup>3</sup> And he will be like a tree firmly planted by streams of water, Which yields its fruit in its  
season,  
And its leaf does not wither;  
And in whatever he does, he prospers.
- <sup>4</sup> The wicked are not so,  
But they are like chaff which the wind drives away.
- <sup>5</sup> Therefore the wicked will not stand in the judgment,  
Nor sinners in the assembly of the righteous.
- <sup>6</sup> For the LORD knows the way of the righteous,  
But the way of the wicked will perish.

The grass withers, the flower fades, But the word of our God stands forever. (Isaiah 40:8)

### Prayer of Illumination

Our Dear Heavenly Father, as we consider now the graciousness of your Law, given for our benefit, and recorded for us in Holy Scripture, we ask for the illumination of our hearts and minds by Your Spirit of truth. I ask that you would forgive all of my sins. Purify these unclean lips of mine and use them for your glory. We ask these things in the name of Your Son; Our Savior and Our King, Jesus Christ. Amen.

### Sermon

Psalm 1 tells us about two different kinds of men. The first kind of man is said to

- walk in the counsel of the wicked,
- stand in the path of sinners, and
- sit in the seat of scoffers

The other kind of man is said to have his "delight in the law of the LORD, in His law he meditates day and night.

Now before I go any further, I want to make it perfectly clear that we are forbidden from hating the man who walks in the counsel of the wicked, stands in the path of sinners, or sits in the seat of scoffers. The Bible commands us

- To love the LORD our God with all our heart, soul, and might [Deuteronomy 6:5]
- As Christians we are to love one another [John 13:34]
- Husbands are commanded to love their wives [Ephesians 5:25]
- Women are commanded to love their husbands and children [Titus 2:4]

- We are commanded to love our neighbors as ourselves [Leviticus 19:18]
- And we are even commanded to love our enemies [Matthew 5:44]

So we are not allowed to hate our fellow human beings who Psalm 1 identifies as people who have no regard for the Law of God. We are not to hate sinners as individuals or as groups of people. In 1Corinthians 6:11 Paul reminds us:

And such were some of you; but you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, and in the Spirit of our God.

I think it is important to make the point that we are not to hate the man who walks in the counsel of the wicked, stands in the path of sinners, or sits in the seat of scoffers because several times this year I have seen either myself or someone close to me accused of hate because we pointed someone to the Law of God. So I just want to say up front, I don't hate anybody. So please don't try to read that into anything I might say this morning. I also want to remind you that it is wrong for any of us to hate sinners either as individuals or as a group.

OK, having said that, Psalm 1 says that there is a blessing for the man whose delight is in the law of the LORD, who meditates on that law day and night. He will be like a tree firmly planted by streams of water, and in whatever he does, he prospers.

Psalm 1 also implies that there will be a curse for the man who does not delight in the Law of the LORD. "They are like chaff which the wind drives away. Therefore, they will not stand in the judgment."

Judgment ... There is something we don't like to talk much about anymore. People don't like to hear that there will be a judgment day or that God's patience does have a limit or that eventually He will pour out his wrath on the wicked. People don't want to hear about that. But the Bible is very clear; God does judge and punish people and nations from time to time. And it is the duty of the people of God to warn the world of that fact.

And it is not unloving to warn someone who is in danger. If someone is standing dangerously close to the edge of a cliff, it is not unloving to make them aware of it. If someone is unwittingly walking toward a rattlesnake's nest, it is not unloving to take them by the arm and pull them back.

Psalm 1 implies that there is a blessing for the man who delights in the Law of the LORD and there is a curse for the man who disregards the Law of the LORD. Psalm 1 implies it. Deuteronomy 28 states it explicitly. It says:

<sup>1</sup> "Now it shall be, if you will diligently obey the LORD your God, being careful to do all His commandments which I command you today, the LORD your God will set you high above all the nations of the earth.

<sup>2</sup> "And all these blessings shall come upon you and overtake you, if you will obey the LORD your God.

<sup>3</sup> "Blessed shall you be in the city, and blessed shall you be in the country.

<sup>4</sup> "Blessed shall be the offspring of your body and the produce of your ground and the offspring of your beasts, the increase of your herd and the young of your flock.

<sup>5</sup> "Blessed shall be your basket and your kneading bowl.

<sup>6</sup> "Blessed shall you be when you come in, and blessed shall you be when you go out.

It also says:

<sup>15</sup> "But it shall come about, if you will not obey the LORD your God, to observe to do all His commandments and His statutes with which I charge you today, that all these curses shall come upon you and overtake you.

<sup>16</sup> "Cursed shall you be in the city, and cursed shall you be in the country.

<sup>17</sup> "Cursed shall be your basket and your kneading bowl.

<sup>18</sup> "Cursed shall be the offspring of your body and the produce of your ground, the increase of your herd and the young of your flock.

<sup>19</sup> "Cursed shall you be when you come in, and cursed shall you be when you go out.

In other words, disregarding the Law of the LORD is a dangerous thing to do.

Psalm 19 tells us that "the law of the LORD is perfect, restoring the soul;" [Psalm 19:7] and Galatians 3 tells us that "the Law is a tutor that leads us to Christ, that we may be justified by faith" [Galatians 3:24]. The Law is where our delight should be. Observance of the law invites blessings upon individuals and societies. But what exactly is this Law that I'm talking about?

Our brother, Tom Kidd, who is an attorney, would probably tell us that we could devote our entire lives to studying law and still not know all there is to know. So it is not going to be possible for me to give the topic an exhaustive treatment this morning. But fortunately for us, our confession of faith devotes a chapter to summarizing our understanding of the Law of God for us. The Reformers understood the Law of God in 3 categories. Those were: the Moral Law, the Ceremonial Law, and the Civil or Judicial Law.

We here at Trinity are most familiar with what is called the Moral Law because it is summarized for us in the Ten Commandments and we either recite or sing it every Sunday. It tells us God's basic concepts of right and wrong regarding our relationship with God and with our fellow man. In our Confession of Faith we state that

The moral law doth for ever bind all, as well justified persons as others, to the obedience thereof; and that, not only in regard of the matter contained in it, but also in respect of the authority of God, the Creator, who gave it. Neither doth Christ, in the Gospel, any way dissolve, but much strengthen this obligation. [WCF 19:5]

So not only has the Moral Law not gone away with the coming of Christ, but our obligation to obey it was actually strengthened.

The Ceremonial Law was given to Israel primarily for religious rites and it included everything from the instructions for offering sacrifices, to burning incense, to religious feasts, to the design of the tabernacle and the temple, right down to the specifications of the priests' underwear.

And we know that the LORD was very serious about the Ceremonial Law. We have an account in Leviticus 10 where the sons of Moses' brother Aaron were serving as priests. And they went into the tabernacle to burn incense before the LORD. And on this particular occasion they did not use the correct kind of fire to burn the incense. And we are told that "fire came out from the presence of the LORD and consumed them, and they died before the LORD. Then Moses said to Aaron, 'It is what the LORD spoke, saying, "By those who come near Me I will be treated as holy.'""

The purpose of the Ceremonial Law was to point the people forward to the coming of Christ. And when Christ came, the Ceremonial Law didn't necessarily go away, but it was fulfilled. As Jesus said in the Sermon on the Mount

Do not think that I came to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I did not come to abolish, but to fulfill. For truly I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not the smallest letter or stroke shall pass away from the Law, until all is accomplished.  
[Matthew 5:17-18]

The Judicial Law which the LORD gave to Ancient Israel, and particularly its application for the church or for society today, has been the most controversial of the 3 categories of law. The Judicial Law, as the LORD gave it to Ancient Israel, was primarily in the form of case law that was given to the civil magistrates as a pattern for how to settle disputes and respond to infractions against the Moral Law.

There were laws like

You shall not move your neighbor's boundary mark, which the ancestors have set, in your inheritance which you shall inherit in the land that the LORD your God gives you to possess. [Deuteronomy 19:14]

And

If a man steals an ox or a sheep, and slaughters it or sells it, he shall pay five oxen for the ox and four sheep for the sheep. [Exodus 22:1]

And

If a fire breaks out and spreads to thorn bushes, so that stacked grain or the standing grain or the field itself is consumed, he who started the fire shall surely make restitution. [Exodus 22:6]

I could go on. But I think you start to get the idea what these laws were like. These were case laws. They didn't cover every possible situation. If someone stole an ox or a sheep the punishment was clear. But if someone stole a goat or a donkey, the consequence would have to be inferred from the case law.

It is also interesting that in the legal code that God gave, the punishment for committing a crime was never jail time. You didn't go to prison for grand theft camel. You had to make restitution. There were of course crimes that were considered so serious that they required the criminal to pay with his life. One such example is in Exodus 21 where it says

... if an ox gores a man or a woman to death, the ox shall surely be stoned and its flesh shall not be eaten; but the owner of the ox shall go unpunished. If, however, an ox was previously in the habit of goring, and its owner has been warned, yet he does not confine it, and it kills a man or a woman, the ox shall be stoned and its owner also shall be put to death. [Exodus 21:28-29]

Now that might seem kind of shocking to our sensibilities. To 21<sup>st</sup> century Americans the idea of a law that would carry the death penalty for the actions of a man's animal might seem really harsh. We might even want to call that cruel and unusual punishment. But we have to remember, the Bible tells us

- Ps 37:28 the LORD loves justice
- Ps 33:5 He loves righteousness and justice
- Ps 25:9 He leads the humble in justice
- Ps 97:2 Righteousness and justice are the foundation of His throne.
- Ps 111:7 The works of His hands are truth and justice;

If it is a law that was written by the LORD, then by definition it is just. Let me say that again. If it is a law that was written by the LORD, then by definition it is just. You have to remember that by nature WE are sinners. By nature WE are totally depraved. And if something seems wrong with the Law of God, then the defect is in **us** and not in the law, or in the LORD.

If you dig deeper into the Judicial Law, you will find that there are actually multiple crimes that carry the death penalty that would be shocking to the sensibilities of 21<sup>st</sup> century Americans; even to people who would call themselves conservatives.

I did a quick search and I found 16 capital offenses. I don't think I found them all, but I think I found most of them. Of course I've already mentioned the man who does not restrain his goring ox<sup>1</sup>. And murder is listed several times in the law as a capital crime.<sup>2</sup> Kidnapping was also a capital crime.<sup>3</sup> But striking your parents<sup>4</sup> or even cursing your parents<sup>5</sup> were also capital crimes.

One that I always liked to tell my children about is what the Judicial Law says should happen to Rebellious Children. Deuteronomy 21 says

If any man has a stubborn and rebellious son who will not obey his father or his mother, and when they chastise him, he will not even listen to them, then his father and mother shall seize him, and bring him out to the elders of his city at the gateway of his home town. And they shall say to the elders of his city, 'this son of ours is stubborn and rebellious, he will not obey us; he is a glutton and a drunkard.' "Then all the men of his city shall stone him to death; so you shall remove the evil from your midst, and all Israel shall hear of it and fear. [Deuteronomy 21:18-21]

In the Judicial Law profaning the Sabbath was a capital offense.<sup>6</sup> So was blasphemy<sup>7</sup>. If a layman approached the Tabernacle he could be stoned to death.<sup>8</sup>

False prophets<sup>9</sup> and people who practiced witchcraft<sup>10</sup> or human sacrifice<sup>11</sup> were all to be stoned to death.

For sexual sins like adultery<sup>12</sup>, fornication, rape, incest<sup>13</sup>, homosexuality<sup>14</sup> or bestiality<sup>15</sup> people were to be stoned to death.

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<sup>1</sup> Ex 21:29

<sup>2</sup> Ex 21:12, Le 24:17,21, Nu 35:16-18,21,31,31

<sup>3</sup> Ex 21:16

<sup>4</sup> Ex 21:5

<sup>5</sup> Ex 21:17, Le 20:9

<sup>6</sup> Ex 31:14-15, 35:2

<sup>7</sup> Le 24:16

<sup>8</sup> Nu 1:51, Nu 3:10, Nu 3:38, Nu 15:35, Nu 18:7

<sup>9</sup> De 13:5

<sup>10</sup> Le 20:27

<sup>11</sup> Le 20:2

Now I don't know about you, but just thinking about that sends shivers up my spine. Because most, if not all, of us who are adults at least know someone who has committed or is continuing to commit one or more of these crimes. For most of us it is probably someone close to us. Maybe even someone we love. In all likelihood it could probably even be said of some of us here in this room. But praise God, there is a way to be forgiven for our sins. As I read earlier from 1Corinthians 6:11

And such were some of you; but you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, and in the Spirit of our God.

But it is sobering to think that all of these offenses were considered by the LORD to be so serious, so detrimental to society, so dangerous, that He wrote them into the Judicial Law of Ancient Israel as capital crimes. Psalm 1 tells us, that blessed is the man whose delight is in the law of the LORD, and in His law he meditates day and night. How far removed are we from the ideal of Psalm 1?

In our confession of faith we assert that there is a general equity to the Judicial Law for all nations. In other words, the Judicial Law which the LORD gave to Ancient Israel is a pattern for any society that would seek to be a truly just society from God's perspective; A blessed society that delights in the Law of the LORD.

Now many people would say "well that was the Old Testament. We're not under law. We're under grace." And that attitude is popular in American dispensational Christianity. I think it is a dangerous attitude. It causes us to throw away about 77% of the Word of God. And we have very little guidance in the New Testament about how to govern a society.

I think it is very interesting that in the passage that Elder Hill read for us a few minutes ago from Romans 1, the Apostle Paul reaffirmed that crimes that carried the death penalty in the Old Testament still deserved the death penalty; even after the coming of Christ and the Gospel. Romans 1:32 reads

and, although they know the ordinance of God, that those who practice such things are **worthy of death**, they not only do the same, but also give hearty approval to those who practice them.

And the "such things" that Paul was writing about are the types of crimes that the Old Testament Judicial Law identified as capital crimes. Both Old and New Testaments affirm these crimes "are worthy of death."

How blessed is the man  
Who does not walk in the counsel of the wicked,  
Nor stand in the path of sinners,  
Nor sit in the seat of scoffers!  
But his delight is in the law of the LORD,  
And in His law he meditates day and night.

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<sup>12</sup> Le 20:10

<sup>13</sup> Le 20:11-12

<sup>14</sup> Le 20:13

<sup>15</sup> Ex 22:19, Le 20:15-16

Just 11 days ago we were reminded that we no longer live in a nation that takes delight in the Law of the LORD. Back in the year 2000, the people of California wanted to protect the traditional definition of marriage. By a majority vote they passed a very simple law that stated:

Only marriage between a man and a woman is valid or recognized in California.

The supreme court of California decided that democracy was not acceptable in this particular case, and ruled the law unconstitutional. The people of California persisted in their desire to protect the traditional definition of marriage and in 2008, by a majority vote, they amended their constitution to state that

Only marriage between a man and a woman is valid or recognized in California.

Now the supreme court of California could not do anything about it. It was part of the constitution. So the opponents of the traditional view of marriage elevated the issue to the US District court in 2010 who ruled the California constitution out of accord with the US Constitution. By the time the case had been elevated to the US Supreme Court last month, there had been a turnover in the California government. And the California government did not wish to support the view that

Only marriage between a man and a woman is valid or recognized in California.

The US Supreme Court ruled that because the government of California did not want to defend their own constitution, the proponents of the amendment had no legal standing to defend the California constitution. So no one was allowed to even speak before the US Supreme Court on behalf of the majority of the California voters. The amendment was effectively struck down. And same-sex marriage licenses began to be issued later that week in California.

Of course California is not the first state to issue same-sex marriage licenses. But this year we are seeing the issue elevated to the national and international level like never before. 30 years ago when I started working for the Department of Defense, under the Uniform Code of Military Justice, it was a crime for military personnel to engage in homosexual behavior. 20 years ago, under the Clinton administration, the policy was changed to "Don't Ask, Don't Tell." Two years ago, it was decriminalized. And today same-sex marriages of military personnel are being celebrated.

400 years ago when the Mayflower brought the pilgrims to the new world, they declared that they were establishing a colony for "the Glory of God, and advancements of the Christian faith."<sup>16</sup> And just a little more than 100 years ago, the US Supreme Court declared that the United States "is a Christian Nation."<sup>17</sup> How did we get from there to here?

Well, I think we forgot to take delight in the law of the LORD and to meditate in it day and night. You see the LORD says,

"I the LORD speak the truth; I declare what is right." [Isaiah 45:19 ESV]

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<sup>16</sup> Mayflower Compact

<sup>17</sup> HOLY TRINITY CHURCH v. U.S. 143 U.S. 457, 12 S.Ct. 511, 36 L.Ed. 226 Feb. 29, 1892

It has been said that there really are only two religions in the world. Either the LORD is God or man is God. It is the same problem we have had since the Garden of Eden when Satan told Eve, if you eat the fruit, you will be like God. If we separate the LORD from our government then there is no authority that is able to say "only marriage between a man and a woman is valid." And two men or two women is only the beginning. What about a relationship between one man, three women, a goat, a Salvador Dali painting and 5 smart phones? Without the LORD, what authority is there who can definitively say that is not a marriage? There is actually a man in Japan who is seriously campaigning to legalize marriages between humans and cartoon characters. Without the God-ordained traditional definition of the family that has been recognized by most cultures for most of human history, we degenerate into chaos.

We need to realize that we are not stepping onto a slippery slope here. Western society is already well into its fall. Ministers in Canada and England are already being arrested for hate crimes for preaching that homosexuality is a sin. It hasn't happened here yet. But I'm pretty sure it is coming. Just last Sunday 2 preachers were assaulted in a park in Seattle for doing nothing more than holding a sign calling on sodomites to repent.<sup>18</sup> Some of you may have seen the story last week about the French mayor who is facing 5 years in prison because he refused to marry a same-sex couple.<sup>19</sup> And there was an article in the Aquila Report this week that documented how many Christian business people right here in America have been forced to either violate their consciences or face harsh penalties because of this issue.<sup>20</sup>

Here closer to home, our own elders are having to wrestle with questions like who will be allowed to use our building for weddings? Or who can hire our pastor's services? And how will we respond if someone tries to force us to violate our conscience?

Many of you know my son, Isaac. And if you know Isaac you know it is hard not to like Isaac. He is a big 6'5" former Covenant College basketball player who lives and works in Chattanooga and he has a great sense of humor. His name fits him so well because the name literally means laughter. And it is a testimony to Isaac's likeability that he has over 1200 face book friends.

In the days leading up to the Supreme Court decision on Proposition 8 last month Isaac posted a Bible verse on his face book wall to express his sentiments about the issue. His post simply read:

Leviticus 20:13 – "If a man has sexual relations with a man as one does with a woman, both of them have done what is detestable. They are to be put to death; their blood will be on their own heads."

And then Isaac added his own personal commentary:

... There goes that bible...causin problems again ...

There are currently 86 responses on Isaac's face book wall and there were several responses that Isaac deleted because he thought that they were just too offensive to be on his wall. It was an eye opening experience for him. People told him that his quotation of the Bible is hateful. People told him he is stupid. He is an idiot. He is a bigot. He was called unloving, snarky, arrogant, vitriolic, and cowardly. Isaac was accused of wanting to execute an entire

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<sup>18</sup> <http://www.lifesitenews.com/news/seattle-gay-pride-marchers-viciously-beat-christian-street-preacher-video>

<sup>19</sup> <http://en.starafrika.com/news/french-mayor-in-court-for-defying-gay-marriage-law.html>

<sup>20</sup> <http://theaquilareport.com/persecution-in-america-chicken-little-vs-the-ostrich>



group of people. The really shocking thing is that many of these comments came from people who claim to be Christians.

The thing is, Isaac Speicher did not write Leviticus 20:13. He would readily acknowledge that he would not have had the wisdom to have written Leviticus 20:13. In reality Moses wasn't even the author of Leviticus 20:13. Leviticus 20:13 was given by the LORD God Almighty as part of the Judicial Law. And if you have an intense negative visceral reaction to the mere reading of the Law of God, if you do not delight in the Law of God, that says a lot more about the condition of your heart than it does about the law. The LORD declares what is true and what is right. If you take delight in His word, there is a blessing that comes with that delight. If you scoff at it, there is a curse.

Friends, we are not living in a culture that is at a crossroads. We are not in danger of abandoning our Christian heritage in western civilization. We are already there. And we can see this at every level of society whether we are talking about our federal, state, or local governments, our military, our churches, our schools and even our friends and families. We have a culture that does not take delight in the Law of the LORD. And same-sex marriage is just one symptom of a much larger problem.

I am so grateful to the men of our church who have organized the Boniface Conference for next month. The theme of the conference is "Flourishing in Exile: Maintaining a faithful witness in an increasingly pagan world." I can't imagine any topic that is currently more relevant. And if you haven't done so already, I would strongly urge you to register and attend that conference.

But today it is my turn to speak. And if you ask me what we should do in an increasingly pagan world I am going to point you where we always point you here at Trinity Presbyterian Church; the Ordinary Means of Grace: the scriptures, prayer, the sacraments and fellowship.

If we are going to take delight in the Law of the LORD, we must first know the Law of the LORD. And in order to do that, we must study it. Many people neglect the Bible because they find it difficult to understand. One thing is certain, you will never understand it or take delight in it if you don't first know what it says. And if something in the Bible puzzles you, there are elders in the church who would be more than happy to help. We need to know what the Bible says and we need to teach it to our children. As the LORD said in Deuteronomy 6

<sup>5</sup> And you shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might. <sup>6</sup> And these words, which I am commanding you today, shall be on your heart; <sup>7</sup> and you shall teach them diligently to your sons and shall talk of them when you sit in your house and when you walk by the way and when you lie down and when you rise up. <sup>8</sup> And you shall bind them as a sign on your hand and they shall be as frontals on your forehead. <sup>9</sup> And you shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates.

Jesus encouraged his disciples that "at all times they ought to pray and not to lose heart." [Luke 18:1] We need to pray for our culture, our government, our churches, our families and our friends. There have been multiple times in world history that the LORD has brought great empires to their knees over night and He still has the power to do it again. We need to repent that neither we nor our society have taken delight in the Law of the LORD and beg Him to change our hearts.

We need to remember that the worship of the LORD is the most important thing we do all week and when we feed on Christ at His table, he strengthens our faith.

And finally, we need to be committed to fellowship with one another. That means more than just having a dinner together once every month. The day may come when our pastor is arrested for standing in this pulpit and calling sin "sin." The day may come when our members are persecuted, or our property is confiscated because of our faithfulness to the LORD. And those will be the times when our fellowship, our love for one another as Christ commanded, will really be tested.

- <sup>1</sup> How blessed is the man who does not walk in the counsel of the wicked,  
Nor stand in the path of sinners,  
Nor sit in the seat of scoffers!
- <sup>2</sup> But his delight is in the law of the LORD,  
And in His law he meditates day and night.
- <sup>3</sup> And he will be like a tree firmly planted by streams of water, Which yields its fruit in its  
season,  
And its leaf does not wither;  
And in whatever he does, he prospers.
- <sup>4</sup> The wicked are not so,  
But they are like chaff which the wind drives away.
- <sup>5</sup> Therefore the wicked will not stand in the judgment,  
Nor sinners in the assembly of the righteous.
- <sup>6</sup> For the LORD knows the way of the righteous,  
But the way of the wicked will perish.

## Closing Prayer

O LORD God, Our Father and Our King:

The Psalmist has written,

"O how I love Thy law! It is my meditation all the day.  
Thy commandments make me wiser than my enemies.  
"How sweet are Thy words to my taste!  
Yes, sweeter than honey to my mouth!"

But the same has written,

"I am exceedingly afflicted;  
Revive me, O LORD, according to Thy word."

Like your people in Egypt so many years ago found themselves under a new king who did not know Joseph, we find ourselves living in a world that has forgotten You. As a society we have not taken delight in Your Law and we are reaping what we have sown. For the sake of your great name, for the sake of our forefathers who sought your glory and the advancement of the Christian faith, and for the sake of our children's children we pray that you would cause our society to repent with a broken spirit and a contrite heart that you will not despise. Teach us once again to delight in your law and meditate in it day and night. Amen.