

**Psalm 119: 33-40; “The Path of Your Commandments”, A Communion Sermon
delivered on the afternoon of July 14th, 2019, by Pastor Paul Rendall,
in the Afternoon Worship Service.**

One of the reasons that you and I come back to the Lord’s table once a month, is to examine ourselves in relation to our obedience to God’s commandments. Our becoming holy is our being taught by God to put into application in our lives, all that He has commanded us; having Christ as our Savior and helper. God saves us through Christ, and then we enter upon a walk of faith; upon the path of righteousness, in which God Himself leads us and teaches us, as verse 35 says – “to walk in the path of His commandments”. In order to make progress in our obedience to God, we as Christians must learn to pray that the Holy Spirit would teach us and help us day by day to be spiritually-minded. What does it mean for one who knows God, through Jesus Christ, to be spiritually-minded? That is the question that I would have us to think about at this hour. I am hoping the you will come to see from these verses that it means that we learn to pray, and to promise, and to declare certain things to God. I find 4 of them in our text.

1st – There are certain things that you will pray that the Lord would teach you, and give to you, before you make promises to Him. (verses 33 and 34)

How much of the Christian life is learning to pray and then to do. But I think that many of us as Christians have the whole thing backwards. We see the commandment and then we go about to do it at once, without prayer. But this will only declare to God your self-sufficiency. In order to do righteousness, to the glory of God, you must become a man or a woman of prayer. When you become devoted to prayer, it declares your total dependence upon God to Him; that you can do nothing to keep His commandments to His glory without His help. Without prayer no real progress can be made in righteousness and holiness. You have to learn to pray – “Teach me the way of Your statutes”, and “Give me understanding”. Then after you are taught by God, and after you are given understanding; then will come the declaration of your promise, “I shall keep it to the end”. And, again in verse 34, “I shall keep your law”. “Indeed, I shall observe it with my whole heart”. The “way” that is spoken of here is related to how you keep His statutes.

When you pray about how you should live your Christian life, you are asking to be shown God’s way of doing things. You are asking that He would teach you His holy way. “Teach me, O Lord Thy holy way, and give me an obedient mind...” Our Lord Jesus was a man of much prayer. Prayer is the strength of Godliness and prayer is the strength of any ministry or service that we do for God. Let me show you this from the life of the Lord Jesus. In Mark 1: 35 it says, “Now in the morning, having risen a long while before daylight, He went out and departed to a solitary place; and there He prayed.” Now, you will notice, that Jesus did not take counsel first with men, no not even with His own disciples; He simply departed to a solitary place; and there He prayed.

We are not told what He prayed, but I believe that He was praying there, in line with the verses of our text: “Teach me, O Lord, the way of Your statutes, and I shall keep it to the end.” He poured out His soul unto God, He fellowshiped and communed with Him, and what He was pleading for was that the Father’s law would be kept in His life. He would do all, so that the glory of the Father would be seen in Him. He would pray and He would face the devil’s temptations. He would pray and He would preach. He would pray and choose His disciples. He would pray and He would also minister to men. It was in prayer that all of these things were put in their right places. Verse 36 says, “And Simon and those who were with Him searched for Him.” “And when they found Him, they said to Him, “Everyone is looking for You.” “But He said to them, ‘Let us go into the next towns, that I may preach there also, because for this purpose I have come forth.’”

It was the preaching of repentance and the kingdom of God being at hand that were Jesus’ highest priorities. He would declare this with power by His ministry to men, by preaching to them, and in healing them and casting out demons. All of His desires for Himself, were related to

“observing God’s law with His whole heart”. And His observing God’s law with His heart was fueled by His prayers. Let me say that this is a pattern for each of us. That is, that before you go promising God what you shall do for Him, you should first learn to develop a consistent prayer life. This will involve not only the times when you will draw aside to a solitary place and pray. But it will also involve many daily prayers in your heart in relation to all the people that are around you every day. You will pray – “How can I truly help them Lord?” “How should I live before them so that Christ is seen in me?” “What can I say to them which will build them up?” “What can I do for them?” “How can I share with them the gospel by my words and my deeds?” “Give me understanding, Lord.” Let me ask if you pray this way? If you do, then you can truly say, “I shall observe your law with my whole heart”. The Lord is very interested in your whole heart. He is not pleased with a divided heart. He would have all the devotion and attention of your heart. You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart. But in order to do this, you must learn to pray.

2nd – There are certain things that you will ask that God would do in your life that will keep you on the path of righteousness. (verses 35 and 36)

You will ask, as the Psalmist did, “Make me walk in the path of Your commandments, for I delight in it.” He was saying, “Make me”, or “cause me” to do this. The reason that he prayed that way was because he knew that even though he had been given a new heart, that still, he needed to come to realize how easy it was to stray from the path of righteousness. A person must be regenerated by the Spirit of God and know that the promise of God will help in this way, in order to pray the way the Psalmist does here. One of the more obvious promises in this regard is found in Ezekiel 36: 26. “I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; I will take the heart of stone out of your flesh and give you a heart of flesh.” “I will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes, and you will keep My judgments to do them.”

Notice that it is God putting His Spirit within a person that will enable them to walk in His statutes. The one trusting in the Lord Jesus knows that ultimately he cannot keep himself doing the right thing and persevering in holiness. That is why Jesus died on the cross. That is why He purchased redemption and the gift of the Holy Spirit’s abiding and working in your heart. The believer in Jesus realizes that in their heart that there are many temptations to sin, and they sense their own inability to do and keep God’s precious commandments, and to live according to all His Word. They will confess, as every true disciple will, that they delight in this pure Word of God. But they are also confessing, that they will need more of the supply of the grace of Christ so that they will be more consistent in doing what is pleasing to God. They will plead for God to come to them, and by the Spirit’s working they know that He can make them walk in the right path.

If you turn over to Romans 7 you will see an example of what is being said here. The same word is used by the Apostle Paul in verse 22. “For I delight in the law of God according to the inward man.” “But I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members.” “O wretched man that I am!” “Who will deliver me from this body of death?” “I thank God – through Jesus Christ our Lord!” “So then with the mind I myself serve the law of God, but with the flesh the law of sin.” Now, beloved, this is not being spoken of an unbeliever, because an unbeliever does not “delight in the law of God after the inner man.” The unbeliever delights in doing things in their own way, and whatever commands of God that they do pursue to keep, they are pursued for selfish ends, for their own glory, and for their being seen as good in the eyes of men. They falsely think that they are meriting favor with God in keeping them.

But the believer comes to understand that the law of God, God’s good commandments, do not of themselves give life to the one who is trying to keep them. God’s holy law righteously demands obedience of us, as representing the will of the holy God, but it does not give the power to do and keep His commandments. The psalmist is saying – Oh Lord, make sure by Your great grace in Christ, that I will be obedient, by leading and guiding me into my obedience, and by helping me by Your Spirit to keep your commandments. Give me wisdom, strength, and power to keep them, and

to keep them from the highest and best of motives; your honor and glory. This is obedience which is pleasing to God. This is the essence of what it means to become holy. There is great delight in the prayers that are prayed, and the actual pursuit of doing of these commandments.

So the Psalmist then prays that God would by His grace, make him to walk in these commandments, and “incline his heart to God’s testimonies, and not to covetousness”, as it says in verse 36. Covetousness, is a sin that is not as easily discovered in us as other sins are. It hides itself well, in the way that think about the things that we want, and then we are able to rationalize our pursuit of all that we sinfully desire, of the things of this world. These are the things of this world that we desire in a carnal, selfish, and fleshly way, which would take our heart off from God and from spiritual-mindedness. This is where God’s holy law does us a great service, when grace is at work in our hearts by God’s Spirit. In Romans 7: 7 Paul says, “What shall we say then?” “Is the law sin?” “Certainly not!” “On the contrary, I would not have known sin except through the law.” “For I would not have known covetousness unless the law had said, You shall not covet.” “But sin, taking opportunity by the commandment, produced in me all manner of evil desire.”

Verse 10 says, “And the commandment, which was to bring life, I found to bring death.” The commandment would bring us life if we could keep it perfectly and from right motives, such as the honor of God and the true welfare and well-being of people around us. But instead Paul says, “sin, taking advantage by the commandment, deceived me, and by it killed me.” We simply must have Christ and His grace to have these motives and this love within our hearts, to even begin to do the least of His commandments. This is why we pray, “Incline my heart to your testimonies.” What testimonies? All of the moral commands and precepts of His Word; their rightness in God’s sight and their goodness for all men. Yes, we know this to be so, but we must also take heed to His testimony of what He has done in the sending of His Son into the world for sinners like ourselves who can never keep one commandment in the right way, except by His grace.

3rd – There are certain things that you will pray; that God would give you the grace, to turn from. (verses 37 -38)

If you would be spiritually minded, if you would make progress in holiness, you must pray in the way that the Psalmist does in verses 37 and 38. “Turn away my eyes from looking at worthless things.” “Revive me in your way.” Everything in the Christian life revolves around what you are looking at, both physically and spiritually. Both are important. As a Christian you have both physical eyes and spiritual eyes. If you are an unbeliever you have only physical eyes. You do not have eyes to see spiritually. You are blind to spiritual truth, and opposed to it when Christians try to share it with you, unless grace is at work and God is striving with you. Your physical eyes are the faculty of your body which allows you to perceive and to comprehend people and objects around you. They take in information about the world around you. And the eyes have also often been called “the gate” or “the window” to the soul. The information which your eyes take in, is conveyed to your mind where it is evaluated by you, as pleasing or displeasing, true or false; and then a response to what you are looking at is called for, from you, to the things which you are looking at.

A sinful man will focus his eyes and his attention on “worthless things” our text says. But you, as a Christian, will be focusing your attention upon Jesus and you will be turning away from worthless things, or vanity. Hebrews Chapter 12 begins by saying, “Therefore since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us, and let us run with endurance the race that set before us, looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.” Now, obviously the Christian cannot see Jesus physically. The Christian “walks by faith and not by sight”. You as a Christian can, and you should, believe that the Lord Jesus is watching you, looking to see if you are spiritually looking at the Word, or whether you are only looking at the world, and minding only the people in it. If you as a Christian are preoccupied with Christ you will ask to be “revived in God’s

way". If the worthless things of this world are the focus of your gaze and affection, then little progress will be made in righteousness and holiness.

It is when you pray to have your physical eyes turned away from taking in sights that would corrupt your soul, that real progress can then be made in righteousness. It is then that you can pray – “Revive me in Your way”, and “Establish Your word to Your servant, who is devoted to fearing You.” How can we apply this to ourselves at this time? Ask yourself – Am I devoted to fearing God? Ask yourself where the focus of your physical eyes goes to at all times. What do you spend your precious time looking at? Is it the television and movies? Take care what you look at. You will not find spiritual life and vitality in many of the scenes portrayed in the vast majority of the shows on television and in the movies today. “Turn my eyes away from looking at worthless things.” Why not read good Christian books? What a wealth of blessing is to be found in them, and yet many Christians seem to be neglecting them. Why not learn to pray and to ask God to show you what you might do for his kingdom and glory. So I would ask you now to come down front where I will give you a few more thoughts before we partake of the Lord’s Supper.

4th – There are certain things you will pray for, knowing that it is only God who can do them; only He can give them to you. (verses 39 and 40)

This is why we are at this table now. There are 2 final requests in prayer that David makes. “Turn away my reproach which I dread”, and “Revive me in your righteousness”. Both will be answered here as we have come to feed upon Christ’s faithfulness. Is David speaking of the reproach of men? There were times when men reproached him; when they laid a charge at His doorstep. There were times when he deserved it, and then there were times that he did not. The same is no doubt true of every person here. For a reproach to be deserved, you have to have sinned against either God or man. But each of us has at times done both. But we have come to this table to remember Christ; to remember that He has borne both our reproach in the sight of men and in the sight of God, if we are trusting in Him. Listen to Romans 8: 31. “What then shall we say to these things?” “If God is for us, who can be against us?” “He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things?” “Who shall bring a charge against God's Elect?” “It is God who justifies.” “Who is he who condemns?” “It is Christ who died, and furthermore is also risen, who is even at the right hand of God, who also makes intercession for us.”

This is what we remember when we come to this table. And we pray also that we would be “revived in God's righteousness”. Christ is the righteousness of God. When you long for God’s precepts to be kept by yourself as an unworthy sinner, and when you see that your obedience falls far short of the perfection set out for you in the commandments of God; will you not remember beloved, that this is why Christ died? When you believe in Jesus it is His righteousness that is imputed to you. You stand clothed in His perfect righteousness, not in the rags of your own. I don’t know if you have ever read John Bunyan's spiritual autobiographical work, *Grace Abounding to the Chief of Sinners* or not? He was a man who was in great agony of soul for the better part of 2 years over whether or not he was a Christian.

But at the end of that time, the verse of Paul's in Romans 3: 24 came to him with some power. “You are justified freely by his grace, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus.” He says, “But, oh, what a turn it made upon me!” “Now was I as one awaked out of some troublesome sleep and dream; and listening to this heavenly sentence, I was as if I had heard it thus expounded to me, “Sinner, you think that because of your sins and infirmities that I cannot save your soul; but, behold my Son is by me, and upon him I look, and not on thee, and deal with thee according as I am pleased with him.” “At this,” he says, “I was greatly lightened in my mind, and made to understand that God would justify a sinner at any time; it was but his looking upon Christ, and imputing of His benefits to us, and the work was forthwith done.” So, realizing that this is the case for each one of us, let us now partake, turning from vanity and worthless things, and ask God to revive us in His righteousness which is found only in Jesus Christ.

