

**Psalm 119: 33-40; "The Way of Your Statutes", A Communion  
Sermon  
Delivered by Pastor Paul Rendall for May 6th, 2007,  
in the Morning 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. Do our lives show forth the praise of what God has done for us in Jesus Christ? He has died for us; are we living for Him? We know, as we come to the Lord's table, that our salvation is not based upon our works. It is not based upon our keeping the law. And we are not under law in terms of our acceptance with God. We are under grace. We need to be under grace because all of our best works before our conversion are as filthy rags in His sight. They are all dead works because they have not been done to His glory; they do not have respect to His righteousness which is set forth in Jesus Christ. They do not have the principle of His life and grace in them. They rather have respect to our own very inadequate righteousness which we mistakenly, and sometimes sinfully, go about to establish, not realizing the spirituality of God's holy law. I think that many people, even some true Christians have a very superficial view of becoming holy. They see holiness as something that they do and become, as apart from the immediate communion with, and power of, Jesus Christ.

But 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. As He teaches us, we really change to conform ourselves to the "way of His statutes." The reason for this ought to be plain to us, but sometimes it is not. It is only Jesus Christ who has obeyed God perfectly and in a manner which pleased God in every respect. No one else; only Jesus. We have come to see ourselves as sinners who need His grace in order to do anything that would please God. But when we do come to see this; when we are convinced by the Spirit's working, that spiritually speaking we are poverty stricken, then we apply to Christ in prayer that He would save from ourselves and take away all of our sins. We then enter upon a walk of faith, upon the path of righteousness, in which God Himself leads us and teaches us, as verse 33 says, "the way of His statutes. 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 we are asking this morning. 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 we pray that the Lord would teach us and give us before we make promises.** (Verses 33 and 34)

How much of the Christian life is learning to pray and then to do. But 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 our self-sufficiency. In order to do righteousness to the glory of God you must become a man or a woman of prayer. This declares your total dependence upon God, 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. We have to learn to pray, "Teach me the way of Your statutes", and "Give me understanding." Then after we are taught by God, and after we are given understanding; then come the declarations of 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 we keep His statutes. When we pray about living our Christian life, we are asking to be shown God's way of doing things. We ask that He would teach us His holy way. "Teach me, O Lord Thy holy way, and give me an obedient mind..." Our Lord Jesus was 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.

Turn with me to Mark Chapter 1. Mark, when relating the great things that the Lord Jesus had done early in His ministry, frequently uses the word, "immediately." I think that this word is used for emphasis; to show us that when God decides to do things, and when God would have men pay attention to those things, He is showing us that He can do them right away if that is His purpose. You see this word used first in verse 10 after Jesus was baptized by John. "And immediately, coming up from the water, He saw the heavens parting and the Spirit descending upon Him like a dove." And verse 12, "immediately the Spirit drove Him into the wilderness." "And He was there in the wilderness forty days, tempted by Satan, and was with the wild beasts; and the angels ministered to Him." And when He called Simon and Andrew, He said, "Follow Me, and I will make you fishers of men, "They immediately left their nets and followed Him." And when He calls James and John, when He first sees them, "...immediately He calls them", and they leave all and follow Him." In verse 21, they went to Capernaum, and "immediately on the Sabbath He entered the synagogue and taught." And the impact on the people there was that His teaching astonished them. He casts out a demon from a man in their synagogue and they said in verse 27, "What is this?" "What new doctrine is this?" "For with authority He commands even the unclean spirits, and they obey Him." "And immediately His fame spread throughout all the region around Galilee." As soon as they had come out of the synagogue, they entered the house of Simon and his wife's mother is lying there sick with a fever, and they told Him

about her at once." "So He came and took her by the hand and lifted her up, and immediately the fever left her." That evening then, they brought to Him all who were sick and those who were demon-possessed, and the whole city was gathered together at the door."

Now, it seems to me that all of the things that I have related to you, in the verses that I have just read to you, are the outcome of a previously developed prayer life in the life of our Lord Jesus. He no doubt had a well-developed habit of prayer in relation to what He was going to do in His ministry. Because His response to all of this "immediate fame" was not to focus first on what men wanted from Him, but to focus on what God wanted from Him. In verse 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." He did not take counsel first with men, no not even 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 that was fueled by His prayers.

Let me say that this is a pattern for each of us. Before we go promising God what we shall do for Him, let us first learn to develop a consistent prayer life. This will involve not only the times when we will draw aside to a solitary place and pray. But it will also involve many daily prayers in our heart in relation to all the people that are around us every day. "How can I truly help them Lord?" "How should I live before them?" "What can I say to them?" "What can I do for them?" "Will they see Christ in me?" "How can I share with them the gospel by my words and my deeds?" "Give me understanding, Lord." Do you pray this way? 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 of our heart. "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart." But to do so you must learn to pray.

**2ndly- There are certain things that we ask that He would do in our life and in our heart that will keep us on the path of righteousness.**

(Verses 35 and 36)

We ask, as the Psalmist did, "Make me walk in the path of Your commandments, for I delight in it." He is saying, "Make me," or "cause me" to do this. The reason that he prays that way is because he knows that even though he has been given a new heart, that still, he has come to realize how easy it is to stray from the path of righteousness. A person must be regenerated by the Spirit of God and know 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 the Spirit within a person that will enable him 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 our heart. The believer in Jesus realizes that in his heart that there are many temptations to sin, and he senses his own inability to do and keep God's precious commandments, and to live according to all His Word. He confesses, as every true disciple will, that he delights in this pure Word of God. But he is confessing also, that he needs more supplies of grace so that he will be more consistent in doing what is pleasing to God. He is pleading for God to come to him, and by the Spirit's working "make" him 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." 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 his own way, and whatever commands of God that he does pursue to keep, they are pursued for selfish ends, for his own glory, and for his being seen as good in the eyes of men. He falsely thinks that he is 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. That law righteously demands obedience, as

representing the will of the holy God, but it does not give the power to do and keep the commandments. He 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 them." "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 very far from legalism. 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. God's commandments are work to the legalist, they are a burden to him and he lays this same burden on others as well. But to the Christian, the "statutes of the Lord are right, rejoicing the heart; the commandment of the Lord is pure, enlightening the eyes." (Psalm 19: 8) Have you come to know the reality of this in your experience, O Christian? If not, then you ought to be praying this way.

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 know sin except through the law." "For I would not have know 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.

Turn with me to Luke 12: 13. "Then one from the crowd said to Jesus, 'Teacher, tell my brother to divide the inheritance with me.'" "But He said to him, 'Man, who made Me a judge or an arbitrator over you?'" "And He said to

them, "Take heed and beware of covetousness, for one's life does not consist in the abundance of the things that he possesses." This man who came to Jesus was covetous. His brother had received a greater share of the family inheritance and he did not think that it was fair. He was looking at what his brother had and he thought that he should have more. This is the nature of covetousness; to look at what others have and to desire the same for ourselves even when God has not given us the means to afford it for ourselves. And so Jesus teaches a parable about the rich fool. He was the man who had ground which yielded plentifully, and so he thought to build bigger barns since he had no room to store his crops. This would have been fine, except for his heart's attitude about the state of his soul before God. He said in verse 18, "I will do this: I will pull down my barns and build greater and there I will store all my crops and my goods." "And I will say to my soul, 'Soul, you have many goods laid up for many years; take your ease, eat, drink, and be merry.'" "But God said to him, 'Fool! This night your soul will be required of you; then whose will those things be which you have provided?' "So is he who lays up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God." What can we learn from this? I believe it relates directly to the prayer of our Psalm 119, verse 36, "Incline my heart to your testimonies and not to covetousness." If we, as believers, do not pray in this way, we could become fools or anxious men. The man of the parable was thinking that he had it made because he had "many goods for many years." And yet he was not rich toward God and his soul was required of him that night. He had nothing stored up with God. He was not seeking God's kingdom and righteousness. He was not pursuing the things of Christ, the things that come from Christ who is above. He had not died to sinful covetousness and so his life was not hidden with Christ above. He did not go to heaven. This is the subtlety of covetousness. Beware of it. Colossians 3: 5 states, "Therefore put to death your members which are on the earth: fornication, uncleanness, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry." Covetousness is an idolatrous sin. It puts money and possessions ahead of knowing God and obeying Him. It produces anxiety and worry. Why? Because we will not pray and ask to be delivered from such a sinful mindset! God is the giver of every good and perfect gift and the greatest gift is eternal life and having Christ in your life, but all of this is a waste of time to the covetous worldling. If he has his money and his possessions, then he thinks that all is fine. But he has deceived himself. Covetousness is stating as having produced powerful sinful desire of every kind in the Apostle Paul, in Romans 7: 8. It is a sin of the flesh along with fornication, uncleanness, and passion. Those who are in the flesh cannot please God. As you come to the table this morning you must ask yourself whether your heart is inclined to God's testimonies or whether it is inclined to covetousness. If there is covetousness there, confess it, and put it away through the blood of Jesus Christ.

**This leads me to say 3rdly - There are certain things that we pray that God would give us grace to turn from.** (Verses 37 -38)

If we would be spiritually minded, if we would make progress in holiness, we 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 we are looking at, both physically and spiritually. Both are important. As Christians we have both physical eyes and spiritual eyes. If we are an unbeliever we have only physical eyes. We do not have eyes to see spiritually. We are blind to spiritual truth and opposed to it when Christians try to share it with us, unless grace is at work and God is striving with us. The eyes of all men are the faculty of the body which allows a person to perceive and to comprehend people and objects around us. They take in information about the world around us. And the eyes have also often been called "the gate" or "the window" to the soul. The information which the eyes take in, is conveyed to the mind and the heart of man where it is evaluated as pleasing or displeasing, true or false, and then a response to what we are looking at is called for, on the part of the person, to the things which he or she is looking at. A sinful man will focus his eyes and his attention on "worthless things" our text says. A Christian will focus his attention upon Jesus and he 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." Obviously the Christian cannot see Jesus physically. The Christian "walks by faith and not by sight." The Christian can and should believe that the Lord Jesus is watching him, looking to see if he is spiritually looking at the Word or whether he is only looking at the world, and minding only the people in it. The Christian is preoccupied with Christ and so he asks to be "revived in God's way." If the worthless things of this world are the focus of the Christian's gaze and affection, then little progress can be made in righteousness and holiness. It is when we pray to have our physical eyes turned away from taking in sights that would corrupt our souls, that real progress can then be made in righteousness. It is then that we 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? Are we devoted to fearing God? We should ask ourselves where the focus of our physical eyes goes to at all times. What do we spend our precious time looking at? Is it the television and movies? There is not much good television in these days in which we are living. We have only 6 channels to watch and often we have to shut it off. My daughter, in speaking with my wife about this said, "Mom, we have 300 channels to watch and still it is no better.

My brethren, we must ask God to turn our eyes away from beholding vanity. Turn away from pornography in all its forms. Turn away from sensuality in all its forms. Turn away from the gross violence that is also offered up in the movies and television. It cheapens the life of man created in the image and likeness of God. It devalues God and His Word and gives us many negative role models. We cannot find spiritual life and vitality in 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 them there are, and yet many Christians seem to be neglecting them. And why not learn to pray and ask God to show you what you might do for his kingdom and glory? Let us now come down to front where I will give you my final point on these verses.

**4thly- There are certain things we pray for, knowing that only He can do them, and only He can give them.** (Verse 39 and 40)

This is why we are at this table this morning. There are 2 final requests in prayer that the Psalmist David makes. "Turn away my reproach which I dread," and "Revive me in your righteousness." Both we are to find here, as we come to the table again. Is David speaking of the reproach of men? There were times when men reproached him. And there were times when he deserved it and then there were times that he did not. The same is no doubt true of every man. For a reproach to be deserved, we have to have sinned against either God or man. But each of us have 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 we "long for God's precepts" to be kept by ourselves, as unworthy sinners, and we see that our obedience falls far short of the perfection set out for us in the commandments of God and of Christ; will you not remember beloved that this is why Christ died? When we believe in Jesus it is His righteousness that is imputed to us. We stand clothed in His perfect righteousness, not in the rags of our 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." Let us come to table, turning from vanity and worthless things, and ask God to revive us in His righteousness which is found only in Jesus Christ.