

“I Believe in Thy Commandments”
(Psalm 119:65-72)

Introduction: Over the past several weeks, we have been exploring what it is that hinders and what it is that strengthens us in our Christian life and experience. We have done this because, as Christians, the greatest desire of our heart is to know and love the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ, and to render the most effective service to Them that we can. Surely they have done enough to win our hearts; we should certainly by now see Them to be worthy of our heart’s affections. The Lord not only made us, but He also redeemed us to Himself when we had rebelled against Him. And now as the subjects of His kingdom, He sovereignly keeps us, subdues our enemies, rules over us, and provides for us in the most gracious manner. It is not for nothing that He calls us to love Him.

But, as we’ve seen in the past, and as our Sunday School class saw this morning, if we are to love Him, we must keep His commandments. God’s commandments are the expression of His holy nature. They are not just an arbitrary set of rules which He made up, and which He could change at any time. They are the things which are agreeable and pleasing to Him, because they reflect what He is like. Therefore, if we are to love God, if He is to take any pleasure in us, we must set our hearts to keep His commandments. Joseph Bellamy, in his book, *Sin, the Law, & the Glory of the Gospel*, sums it up in this way, “For no man loves God who does not love the law. He that is an enemy to one, is to the other” (Trinity Book Service Flyer, July 1998, p. 2).

This is what the psalmist realized as he wrote this lengthy psalm. These are not the ramblings of a man who rejoiced in salvation by the law. These are not the words of a misguided legalist. These are the words of a man who was captivated with love for God and a desire to be like Him. These are the words of a man who longed after holiness and communion with God. These are the words of a true Christian, for everyone who is truly converted by the Lord will delight in His Law. And, I should also add, these are the words of a man who was inspired by the Spirit of Holiness, who was not only kept free from error while he was writing, but who also had the principle of holiness implanted in his heart which gave him the desire to write these things.

Though this Psalm contains many wonderful and edifying truths for us to consider, truths which we should set our minds and hearts to meditate on, what I would like for us to consider from this section is that,

The commandments, and obedience to them, is the way to experience the blessings of God, through Jesus Christ. God is gracious and will teach us the way of holiness if we but ask Him.

I. First, the psalmist reflects on the goodness of the Lord in fulfilling His promises to him. He writes, “Thou hast dealt well with Thy servant, O Lord, according to Thy Word . . . Thou art good and doest good” (v. 65, 68a).

A. In this section, he begins by pronouncing a universal truth about God: He is good.

1. King David wrote, “O taste and see that the LORD is good; how blessed is the man who takes refuge in Him” (Ps. 34:8)!

a. David, realizing God’s goodness, issues this invitation to all men to test the Lord, in

- a good sense, to find out for themselves that the Lord is good. That is His nature.
- b. And the apostle John shows us what the well-spring of this goodness is in God. It is His love. He says, "God is love" (1 John 4:8). Goodness is only one of the many ways in which God expresses His love. Some of the other ways in which He does it is through His mercy, His patience, His kindness, and especially His grace. Grace is the apex, the greatest expression of His love, and it's reserved only for His elect.
 - c. And this goodness is unique in God. When the rich young ruler called Jesus "Good teacher," Jesus responded, "Why do you call Me good? No one is good except God alone" (Mark 10:18).
 - d. Jesus was not denying that He was God, but only seeking to know from the man whether or not he recognized that He was God, and that therefore, He is actually good. But notice that He says that God alone is good.
 - e. The devil and his demons are not good. Their nature is wholly corrupted. Fallen men are not good, for they share the same nature with the devil. Even redeemed men are not good, for they are still in a large measure polluted with sin, although redeemed by grace. What about the angels, are they good? They do have a goodness which is derived from God, who is the mainspring of goodness. They are kept by God from falling into sin, as the evil angels did who were not kept by this grace.
 - f. But in the sense in which Christ is speaking, they are not good, for Jesus says that no one is good, except God alone. This is something unique to God.
2. But the point is that because God is good, it is His nature to do good.
 - a. The psalmist writes, "Thou art good and doest good."
 - b. Whatever the nature of anything is, that is how it will express itself. Wicked men express their wickedness through acts of wickedness, and those who are righteous express that righteousness through acts of righteousness.
 - c. Because God is good, He expresses His nature through doing good.
- B. And the one general thing the psalmist points to as the way in which God expresses this goodness is that God keeps His promises.
1. To realize the goodness of God in this, we must remember that God is not bound to do anything good for any of His creatures.
 - a. God is sovereign over all that He has made. He could have, once He created everything, let it all die by not sustaining it. No one of His creatures has any claim on Him. None can demand anything of Him.
 - b. Everything that we and all of creation receive is purely of His goodness.
 2. But even though God is not bound to do so, He has graciously promised to His children that He would.
 - a. And this is what the psalmist refers to. God does not need to make any promises.
 - b. But once God has promised, then He has obligated Himself to keep those promises, for God is not only good, but is true, and He cannot deny Himself.
 - c. But even though God in His goodness purposed to provide for us, as we were originally created by Him, we forfeited that goodness through our fall in Adam.

We, in ourselves, do not deserve any good thing from the hand of God. But yet, God, in His goodness, continued to give us good gifts, even when we were yet rebels and outside of Christ. *The Bible says that He even sent His Son to die for us while we were yet sinners* (Rom. 5:8).

- d. This is an amazing display of His goodness to a fallen world. This is very likely what Jesus meant in John 3:16, where He said, “For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life.”
- e. Before we came to Christ, while we were yet the objects of His wrath, He sent His Son to die for us. Yes, He loved us as His elect people with an everlasting love, but that love was only as He considered us in His Son. While we were outside of Christ, we were still His enemies. And it was while we were still His enemies that Christ died for us. “Amazing love!” Charles Wesley wrote, “How can it be that Thou, my God, shouldst die for me?”
- f. Now that God has bound Himself by oath in Christ Jesus, we know that we shall never perish. How “much more,” Paul writes, “having now been justified by His blood,” shall we “be saved from the wrath of God through Him” (Rom. 5:9)?
- g. God, in His goodness, has promised that He will give life to all who will come to Him through His Son. He has even promised to give His Holy Spirit to His elect to make them willing and able to come to Him. But not only this, to those who do come by His grace, He has promised to make them co-heirs of the kingdom with Christ.
- h. Those of you who have tasted of this kindness of the Lord, know that He is true. You know that God will fulfill all of His promises towards you in Christ Jesus.
- i. But those of you outside of Christ have yet to try God at His Word. “Taste and see that the Lord is good; how blessed is the man who takes refuge in Him” (Ps. 34:8)! Come to Him this morning and find out the riches of His grace for all who will lay hold of Him in Christ Jesus. Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and God will be faithful to His promise to save you.

II. The psalmist, reflecting on this goodness, then requests of the Lord that He would instruct him in the right way. “Teach me good discernment and knowledge, for I believe in Thy commandments. . . . Teach me Thy statutes” (vv. 66, 68b).

- A. Isn’t this the proper response to God’s goodness?
 1. God has an purpose in blessing us: It is that we might glorify Him.
 2. But we cannot glorify Him as long as we live in rebellion against Him. We may only bring Him honor and glory, if we reflect His nature.
 3. Therefore, the psalmist prays for discernment and knowledge. He prays that the Lord would teach him His commandments and statutes.
 - a. He wants to do it God’s way, not the way of his own heart, for he knows that his heart will deceive him.
 - b. He says to the Lord, “Give me a taste for what is good, help me to know what is right. Teach me your ways!”
- B. But there is another reason why the psalmist makes this request. It is because he believes in the Lord’s commandments.

1. That is, he trusts in them; he knows that they are the right way.
2. They are way of safety, for this is the way that the Lord has prescribed to keep our feet from running into mischief and trouble. As long as you walk in them, nothing will ultimately do you any harm.
3. But they are also the way to blessing. This is what David meant in Psalm 19, where he wrote, “Moreover, by them Thy servant is warned; in keeping them there is great reward” (v. 11).
 - a. Solomon understood these things, and that is why He asked God for a wise and understanding heart. He wanted to know God’s way not only for himself, but for the whole nation over which the Lord had placed him. He knew that it was the right way in which to walk!
 - b. The psalmist writes, “O how I love Thy law! It is my meditation all the day. Thy commandments make me wiser than my enemies, for they are ever mine. I have more insight than all my teachers, for Thy testimonies are my meditation. I understand more than the aged, because I have observed Thy precepts” (Ps. 119:97-100).
 - c. God’s commandments are the right way, they are the good way, they are the way to blessing.
 - d. They are such, not because, by our keeping them, we deserve the blessing of God, but because God has promised to bless us if we keep them.
 - e. God even gives greater prosperity to those outside of Christ who keep them.
 - f. But He particular blesses His children who keep them because they love Him and His Son Jesus Christ.
 - g. Therefore, if you understand these things, the psalmist’s prayer should be yours as well. You should pray for the ability to discern between good and evil. You should pray that the Lord would give you the knowledge of His commandments.
 - h. Don’t forget that the devil, the world and your flesh are doing all that they can to keep you in ignorance of these things and to keep you from doing them. We mustn’t forget what we have learned from the Scriptures and from John Owen about the deceitfulness of sin. The author to the Hebrews writes, “But encourage one another day after day, as long as it is *still* called ‘Today,’ lest any one of you be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin” (Heb. 3:13). Sin is deceitful, and it is no more successful than when it has convinced you that you do not need to obey God’s will.

III. The psalmist now tells us one of the ways in which the Lord answered this prayer. He writes, “Before I was afflicted I went astray, but now I keep Thy word. . . . It is good for me that I was afflicted, that I may learn Thy statutes” (vv. 67, 71).

- A. When we pray that the Lord would give us discernment and knowledge, we had better be prepared for God will do it in the way that He knows is best.
 1. The psalmist here speaks of his going off the path of righteousness, of going astray, of not keeping God’s Word.
 2. But God remedied that situation by bringing affliction. He applied the rod. And afterwards the psalmist kept His commandments.
 3. He said that it was good that he was afflicted that he might *learn* God’s statutes.
 - a. Don’t forget that God teaches us by the rod in the same way that we do our children.
 - b. What is the purpose of discipline after all, except to correct bad behavior and to

instruct in good behavior?

- c. The psalmist strayed onto the wrong paths until God applied the rod of affliction, then he walked again in the right way.
- d. This, he says, was good, that he might *learn*, that is, *that he might learn God's ways*. Tonight, we will explore more on this topic: God's discipline.
- e. But I should mention here, in connection with our goal of seeking to serve the Lord more whole-heartedly, that the more we sin, the more we will harden our hearts and fall under God's chastening hand, and the less we will be able to accomplish for Him, indeed, the less we will want to accomplish for Him.
- f. But the more we turn from our sins, the more we will experience His love and blessing and the more we will be able to produce for Him. But more on that this evening.

- B. Notice what God used to afflict the psalmist: the agency of evil men. He says, "The arrogant have forged a lie against me . . . Their heart is covered with fat" (vv. 69a, 70a).
 1. This is one of the methods which God uses to chasten and to instruct.
 2. God raised up arrogant men who lied about the psalmist. They are those "who," he says, "are not in accord with Thy law", that is, God's Law (v. 85). He raised up men whose hearts were covered with fat. He does not mean here men who were obese or who had high levels of cholesterol, but those whose hearts were insulated and insensitive to sin, men who could tell lies and not be smitten by their own consciences. God uses the evil actions of men for good purposes.
 3. And this brought distress to the psalmist. It is a terrible thing to have to live in an environment where the atmosphere is polluted by the lies of the devil against you. The psalmist surely felt the rod of his Master on his back.

V. But it had its perfect result: The psalmist loved God's Law even more and set his heart even more steadfastly to follow it. "Before I was afflicted I went astray, but now I keep Thy Word . . . With all my heart I will observe Thy precepts . . . I delight in Thy law . . . The law of Thy mouth is better to me than thousands of gold and silver pieces" (vv. 67, 69b, 70b, 72).

- A. The psalmist had prayed that the Lord would hear and teach him His commandments. Before the correction of His Lord, he went astray. But now his heart is strengthened to keep God's commandments.
 1. His whole heart is now detached from the world and attached to God's will, "With all my heart I will observe Thy precepts."
 2. The law was now his what his heart was beating for, "But I delight in Thy law."
 3. And the Law was now his greatest treasure, "The law of Thy mouth is better to me than thousands of gold and silver pieces."
- B. Brethren, this, I would submit to you, is the proper attitude towards God's Law.
 1. It is not a system of works to be abhorred and cast away. It is the way of obedience and the way of God's blessing.
 2. Sin, that which God hates, is defined as the breaking of that Law. But righteousness is defined as the keeping of that same Law.
 3. Even Christ Himself was born under the Law, that He might keep the Law that He

might earn for His people a perfect righteousness. We must not forget that Christ kept the Law, and died to atone for the breaking of the Law, in order to repair the Father's honor which was violated by our breaking the Law. If we would be righteous, as He is righteous, we must walk as He walked. If we would not violate the Father's honor, we must keep His commandments.

4. The Law is that by which Christ governs His kingdom. Jesus said, "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. Whoever then annuls one of the least of these commandments, and so teaches others, shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but whoever keeps and teaches *them*, he shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven" (Matt. 5:18-19). Do you want to be great in the kingdom of heaven? Keep and teach the commandments of God.
5. It is the basis upon which God determines His blessings in this life and in that life which is to come. If you are an obedient Christian, you can expect greater measures of temporal and spiritual blessings in this life, and in the life to come, by God's grace. If you are a Christian who struggles with obedience, you can expect to experience less of God's blessing now and in the life to come.
6. And lastly, keeping Christ's commandments is one of the foremost ways in which we may know that we are the Lord's. If we are truly born again from above, we will have more than mere thankfulness for what God has done for us, we will also find that God and the things of God will be our greatest delight. God's Law will be better to us than all the money in the world. It will be our chief delight, because it reflects the holiness of the One we love the most!
7. Is the Law therefore something which we can afford to overlook? Is it something which is optional for us as Christians? No! *It is by keeping it that we show our love and gratitude to God for saving us from the consequences of our own breaking of it, it by loving it and keeping it that we may know that we are truly born again from above, and it is by keeping it that we can experience more of His blessing both below and above.* It is the way of life for the Christian. The Lord says to us, "You shall be holy, for I the LORD your God am holy" (Lev. 19:2).
8. I would encourage you therefore to make this prayer of the psalmist your own prayer this morning, "Teach me good discernment and knowledge . . . teach me Thy statutes . . . for I believe in Thy commandments." May the Lord grant to each of us this morning that we may. Amen.