

THE GOLDEN ALPHABET

by C.H. Spurgeon

Spurgeon's exposition of Psalm 119 arranged by the Hebrew alphabet, with each section expounding on God's Word and its infinite value to believers through the longest psalm in Scripture.

25 Chapters

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Chapter 1

BOOK: The Golden Alphabet

The Golden Alphabet A Devotional Commentary on Psalms 119 by
C. H. Spurgeon

Prefatory Word

Prefatory Word The Treasury of David, in seven large volumes, is to be found in thousands of libraries, but it is too huge a work to be commonly known among the thousands of Israel. Hence it came into my mind to publish certain parts of it in smaller books, that many more might be profited by it. The One Hundred and Nineteenth Psalm is of such a size as to stand out from all the rest, and claim a separate treatment. It is known among the Germans as "The Christians' golden A B C of the praise, love, power, and use of the Word of God"; and from them I have borrowed the title of this volume. Each portion of the Psalm begins with a letter of the Hebrew alphabet. As a specimen, we would show how the first eight verses may be so rendered as to begin in each case with the letter A, or Aleph.

"A blessing is on them that are undefiled in the way, and walk in the law of Jehovah; A blessing is on them that keep his testimonies, and seek him with their whole heart;

Also on them that do no wickedness, but walk in his ways. A law hast thou given unto us, that we should diligently keep thy commandments.

Ah, Lord! that my ways were so directed that I might keep thy statutes I And then shall I not be confounded, while I have respect unto all thy commandments. As for me, I will thank thee with an unfeigned heart, when I shall have learned thy righteous judgments. An eye will I have unto thy statutes:

O forsake me not utterly."

This psalm is a wonderful composition. Its expressions are many as the waves, but its testimony is one as the sea. It deals all along with one subject only; but although it consists of a considerable number of verses, some of which are very similar to others, yet throughout its one hundred and seventy-six stanzas the self-same thought is not repeated: there is always a shade of difference, even when the colour of the thought appears to be the same. Some have said that in it there is an absence of variety; but that is merely the observation of those who have not studied it. I have weighed each word, and looked at each syllable with lengthened meditation; and I bear witness that this sacred song has no tautology in it, but is charmingly varied from beginning to end. Its variety is that of a kaleidoscope: from a few objects innumerable permutations and combinations are produced. In the kaleidoscope you look once, and there is a strangely beautiful form: you shift the glass a very little, and another shape, equally delicate and beautiful, is before your eyes. So it is here. What you see is the same, and yet never the same: it is the same truth, but it is always placed in a new light, put in a new connection, or in some way or other invested with freshness.

I do not believe that any subject other than a heavenly one would have allowed of such a psalm being written upon it; for the themes of this world are narrow and shallow. Neither could such a handling have been given even to a sacred subject by any mind less than divine; inspiration alone can account for the fulness and freshness of this psalm. The best compositions of men are soon exhausted; they are cisterns, and not springing fountains. You enjoy them very much at the first

acquaintance, and you think you could hear them a hundred times over; but you could not: you soon find them wearisome. Very speedily a man eats too much honey: even children at length are cloyed with sweets. All human books grow stale after a time; but with the Word of God the desire to study it increases, while the more you know of it the less you think you know. The Book grows upon you: as you dive into its depths you have a fuller perception of the infinity which remains unexplored. You are still sighing to enjoy more of that which it is your bliss to taste. All this is true even of the psalm which is in itself nothing more than the eulogy of the divine testimony. This wonderful psalm, from its great length, helps us to wonder at the immensity of Scripture. From its keeping to the same subject it helps us to adore the unity of Scripture, for it is but one. Yet, from the many turns it gives to its one thought, it helps us to see the variety of Scripture. How manifold are the words and thoughts of God! In his Word, just as in creation, the wonders of his skill are displayed in many ways.

I admire in this psalm the singular commingling of testimony, prayer, and praise. In one verse the Psalmist bears witness; in a second verse he praises; in a third verse he prays. It is an incense made up of many spices; but they are wonderfully compounded and worked together, so as to form one perfect sweetness. The blending greatly increases the value of the whole. You would not like to have one-third of the psalm composed of prayer—marked up to the sixtieth verse, for instance; and then another part made up exclusively of praise; and yet a third portion of unmixed testimony. It is best to have all these divinely-sweet ingredients intermixed, and wrought into a sacred unity, as you have them in this thrice-hallowed psalm. Its prayers bear testimony, and its testimonies are fragrant with praise.

Mr. Charles Bridges has written upon this psalm a peculiarly delightful work. I do not seek to rival him; but I would attempt the edification of the Lord's people in the same way as he has done, for he has made no effort to display learning, but has aimed at promoting devotion. Several notable authors traversed this heavenly country before Mr. Bridges, and I am one of those who follow after him: the succession will not end till the Lord comes.

I commend my labour to my Lord's acceptance, and pray that his Holy Spirit may make these praises of Holy Scripture to ring as sweet bells in the ears of his own people evermore.

Dear Reader, pray for Thy brother in Christ, C. H. Spurgeon Westwood, July, 1887.

Psalm 119

Psalm CXIX

There is no special title to this Psalm, neither is any author's name mentioned. It is the longest PSALM, and this is a sufficiently distinctive name for it. It equals in bulk twenty-two psalms of the average length of the Songs of Degrees. Nor is it long only; for it equally excels in breadth of thought, depth of meaning, and height of fervour. It is like the celestial city which lieth four-square, and the height and the breadth of it are equal. Many superficial readers' have imagined that it harps upon one string, and abounds in pious repetitions and redundancies; but this arises from the shallowness of the readers own mind: those who have studied this divine hymn, and carefully noted each line of it, are amazed at the variety and profundity of the thought. Using only a few words, the writer has produced permutations and combinations of meaning which display his holy familiarity with his subject, and the sanctified ingenuity of his mind. He never repeats himself; for if the same sentiment recurs it is placed in a fresh connection, and so exhibits another interesting shade of meaning. The more one studies it the fresher it becomes. As those who drink the Nile water like it better every time they take a draught, so does this Psalm become the more full and fascinating the oftener you turn to it It contains no idle word; the grapes of this cluster are almost to bursting full with the new wine of the kingdom. The more you look into this mirror of a gracious heart the more you will see in it. Placid on the surface as the sea of glass before the eternal throne, it yet contains within its depths an ocean of fire, and those who devoutly gaze into it shall not only see the brightness, but feel the glow of the sacred flame. It is loaded with holy sense, and is as weighty as it is bulky. Again and again have we cried while studying it, "Oh the depths!" Yet these depths are hidden beneath an apparent simplicity, as Augustine has well and wisely said, and this makes the exposition all the more difficult. Its obscurity is hidden beneath a veil of light, and hence only those discover it who are in thorough earnest, not only to look on the word, but, like the angels, to look into it The Psalm is alphabetical. Eight stanzas commence with one letter, and then another eight with the next letter, and so the whole Psalm proceeds by octonaries quite through the twenty-two letters of the Hebrew alphabet. Besides which, there are multitudes of appositions of sense, and others of those structural formalities with which the oriental mind is pleased,—formalities very similar to those in which our older poets indulged. The Holy Spirit thus deigned to speak to men informs which were attractive to the attention and helpful to the memory. He is often plain or elegant in his manner, but he does not disdain to be quaint or formal if thereby his design of instruction can be the more surely reached. He does not despise even contracted and artificial modes of speech, if by their use he can fix his teaching upon the mind. Isaac Taylor has worthily set forth the lesson of this fact:—"In the strictest sense this composition is conditioned; nevertheless in the highest sense is it an utterance of spiritual life; and in thus finding these seemingly opposed elements, intimately commingled as they are throughout this Psalm, a lesson full of meaning is silently conveyed to those who shall receive it—that the conveyance of the tilings of God to the human spirit is in no way damaged or impeded, much less is it deflected or vitiated, by its subjugation to those modes of utterance which most of all bespeak their adaptation

to the infancy and the childlike capacity of the recipient." The fashion among modern writers is, as far as possible, to take every one of the Psalms from David. As the critics of this school are usually unsound in doctrine and unspiritual in tone, we gravitate in the opposite direction, from a natural suspicion of everything which comes from so unsatisfactory a quarter. We believe that David wrote this Psalm. It is Davidic in tone and expression, and it tallies with David's experience in many interesting points. In our youth our teacher called it "David's pocket-book," and we incline to the opinion then expressed, that Jure we have the royal diary written at various times throughout a long life. No, we cannot give up this Psalm to the enemy. "This is David's spoil." After long reading an author, one gets to know his style, and a measure of discernment is acquired by which his composition is detected even if his name be concealed: we feel a kind of critical certainty that the hand of David is in this thing, yea, that it is altogether his own. The one theme of this Psalm is the word of the Lord. The Psalmist sets his subject in many lights, and treats of it in divers ways, but he seldom omits to mention the word of the Lord in each verse under some one or other of the many names by which he knows it; and even if the name be not there, the subject is still heartily pursued in every stanza. He who wrote this wonderful song was saturated with those books of Scripture which he possessed. Andrew Bonar tells of a simple Christian in a farmhouse who had meditated the Bible through three times. This is precisely what this Psalmist had done,—he had gone past reading into meditation. Like Luther, David had shaken every fruit-tree in God's garden, and gathered golden fruit therefrom. "The most," says Martin Boos, "read their Bibles like cows that stand in the thick grass, and trample under their feet the finest flowers and herbs." It is to be feared that we too often do the like. This is a miserable way of treating the pages of inspiration. May the Lord prevent us from repeating that sin while reading this priceless Psalm!

There is an evident growth in the subject-matter. The earlier verses are of such a character as to lend themselves to the hypothesis that the author was a young man, while many of the later passages could only have suggested themselves to age and wisdom. In every portion, however, it is the fruit of deep experience, careful observation, and earnest meditation. If David did not write it, there must have lived another believer of exactly the same order of mind as David, and he must have addicted himself to psalmody with equal ardour, and have been an equally hearty lover of Holy Writ. Our best improvement of this sacred composition will come through getting our minds into intense sympathy with its subject. In order to this, we might do well to commit it to memory. Philip Henry's daughter wrote in her diary, "I have of late taken some pains to learn by heart Psalm CXIX., and have made some progress therein." She was a sensible, godly woman.

Having rehearsed the subject-matter of this golden Psalm, we should still further consider the fulness, certainty, clearness, and sweetness of the word of God, since by such reflections we are likely to be stirred up to a warm affection for it. What favoured beings are those to whom the Eternal God has written a letter in his own hand and style! What ardour of devotion, what diligence of composition, can produce a worthy eulogium for the divine testimonies! If ever one such has fallen from the pen of man it is this 119th Psalm, which might well be called the holy souls soliloquy before an open Bible. This sacred ode is a little Bible, the Scriptures condensed, a mass of Bibline, Holy Writ rewritten in holy emotions and actions. The Germans called it "The Christian's golden A B C of the praise, love, power, and use of the Word of God. Blessed are they who can read and understand these saintly aphorisms: they shall find golden apples in this true Hesperides, and come to reckon that this Psalm, like the whole Scripture which it praises, is a

pearl island, or, better still, a garden of sweet flowers. The study of this sacred song has often proved helpful to holy men. Henry Martyn mentions it again and again in his diary; as for instance—"I experienced a solemn gladness in learning this part, MEM, of the 119th Psalm" William Wilberforce makes this record during a time of political trouble: "Walked from Hyde Park Corner repeating the 119th Psalm in great comfort." Pascal, in the reading of this holy song, seemed to pass out of himself in holy rapture. May those who shall read the Psalm, accepting the help of our exposition, feel their hearts burn within them! To this end, at the very outset let our prayer ascend to God, that his Holy Spirit may rest upon us while we devoutly peruse the volume.

Exposition of Psalm 119:1-8

Exposition of Psalms 119:1-8 1. BLESSED are the undefiled in the way, who walk in the law of the Lord.

2. Blessed are they that keep his testimonies, and that seek him with the whole heart.
3. They also do no iniquity: they walk in his ways.
4. Thou hast commanded us to keep thy precepts diligently.
5. O that my ways were directed to keep thy statutes!
6. Then shall I not be ashamed, when I have respect unto all thy commandments.
7. I will praise thee with uprightness of heart, when I shall have learned thy righteous judgments.
8. I will keep thy statutes: O forsake me not utterly.

These first eight verses are taken up with a contemplation of the blessedness which comes through keeping the statutes of the Lord. The subject is treated in a devout manner rather than in a didactic style. Heart-fellowship with God is enjoyed through a love of that word which is God's way of communing with the soul by his Holy Spirit. Prayer and praise and all sorts of devotional acts and feelings gleam through these verses like beams of sunlight through an olive grove. You are not only instructed, but influenced to holy emotion, and helped to express the same.

Lovers of God's Holy Word are blessed, because they are preserved from defilement (verse 1), because they are made practically holy (verses 2 and 3), and are led to follow after God sincerely and intensely (verse 2). It is made clear that holy walking must be desirable, because God commands it (verse 4); therefore the pious soul prays for it (verse 5), and feels that its comfort and courage must depend upon obtaining it (verse 6). In the prospect of answered prayer, yea, while the prayer is being answered, the heart is full of thankfulness (verse 7), and is fixed in solemn resolve not to miss the blessing if the Lord will give enabling grace (verse 8). The changes are rung upon the words "way"—"undefiled in the way," "walk in his ways," "O that my ways were directed": "keep"—"keep his testimonies," "keep thy precepts diligently," "directed to keep," "I will keep": and "walk"—"walk in the law," "walk in his ways." Yet there is no tautology; nor is the same thought repeated, though to the careless reader it may seem so. The change from statements about others and about the Lord to more personal dealing with God begins in the fourth verse, and becomes more clear as we advance, till in the later verses the communion becomes most intense and soul moving. "I will praise thee. I will keep thy statutes. O forsake me not utterly." O that every reader may feel the glow of personal devotion while studying this first section of the psalm!

1. "Blessed are the undefiled in the way, who walk in the law of the Lord."

"Blessed." The Psalmist is so enraptured with the law of the Lord, that he regards it as his highest ideal of blessedness to be conformed to it. He has gazed on the beauties of the perfect law, and,

as if this verse were the sum and outcome of all his emotions, he exclaims, "Blessed is the man whose life is the practical transcript of the will of God." True religion is not cold and dry; it has its exclamations and raptures. We not only judge the keeping of God's law to be a wise and proper thing, but we are warmly enamoured of its holiness, and cry out in adoring wonder, "Blessed are the undefiled!" meaning thereby, that we eagerly desire to become such ourselves. We wish for no greater happiness than to be perfectly holy. It may be that the writer laboured under a sense of his own faultiness, and therefore envied the blessedness of those whose walk had been more pure and clean; indeed, the very contemplation of the perfect law of the Lord upon which he now entered was quite enough to make him bemoan his own imperfections, and sigh for the blessedness of an undefiled walk.

True religion is always practical, for it does not permit us to delight ourselves in a perfect rule without exciting in us a longing to be conformed to that rule in our daily conduct. A blessing belongs to those who hear and read and understand the word of the Lord: yet is it a far greater blessing to be actually obedient to it, and to carry out in our walk and conversation what we learn in our searching of the Scriptures. Purity in our way and walk is the truest blessedness. This first verse is not only a preface to the whole psalm, but it may also be regarded as the text upon which the rest is a discourse. It is similar to the benediction of the first psalm, which is set in the forefront of the entire book: there is a likeness between this 119th Psalm and the Psalter, and this is one point of it, that it begins with a benediction. In this, too, we see some foreshadowings of the Son of David, who began his great sermon as David began his great psalm. It is well to open our mouth with blessings. When we cannot bestow them, we can show the way of obtaining them, and even if we do not yet possess them ourselves, it may be profitable to contemplate them, that our desires may be excited, and our souls moved to seek after them. Lord, if I am not yet so blessed as to be among the undefiled in thy way, yet I will think much of the happiness which these enjoy, and set it before me as my life's ambition. As David thus begins his psalm, so should young men begin their lives, so should new converts commence their profession, so should all Christians begin every day. Settle it in your hearts as a first postulate and sure rule of practical science, that holiness is happiness, and that it is our wisdom first to seek the kingdom of God and his righteousness. Well begun is half done. To start with a true idea of blessedness is beyond measure important. Man began with being blessed in his innocence, and if our fallen race is ever to be blessed again, it must find blessedness where it lost it at the beginning, namely, in conformity to the command of the Lord.

"The undefiled in the way." They are in the way, the right way, the way of the Lord, and they keep that way, walking with holy carefulness, and washing their feet daily, lest they be defiled by contact with the world. They enjoy great blessedness in their own souls; indeed, they have a foretaste of heaven, where the blessedness lieth much in being absolutely undefiled; and could they continue utterly and altogether without defilement, doubtless they would have the days of heaven upon earth. Outward evil would little hurt us if we were entirely rid of the evil of sin, an attainment which, with the best of us, lies still in the region of desire, and is not yet fully reached, though we have so clear a view of it that we see it to be blessedness itself; and therefore we eagerly press towards it.

He whose life is in a gospel sense undefiled, is blessed, because he could never have reached this point if a thousand blessings had not already been bestowed on him. By nature we are defiled and out of the way, and we must therefore have been washed in the atoning blood to remove

defilement, and we must have been converted by the power of the Holy Ghost, or we should not have been turned into the way of peace, nor be undefiled in it. Nor is this all; for the continual power of grace is needed to keep a believer in the right way, and to preserve him from pollution. All the blessings of the covenant must have been in a measure poured upon those who from day to day have been enabled to perfect holiness in the fear of the Lord. Their way is the evidence of their being the blessed of the Lord.

David speaks of a high degree of blessedness; for some are in the way, and are true servants of God; but they are as yet faulty in many ways, and bring defilement upon themselves. Others who walk in the light more fully, and maintain closer communion with God, are enabled to keep themselves unspotted from the world; and these enjoy far more peace and joy than their less watchful brethren. Doubtless, the more complete our sanctification the more intense our blessedness. Christ is our way, and we are not only alive in Christ, but we are to live in Christ: the sorrow is, that we bespatter his holy way with our selfishness, self-exaltation, wilfulness, and carnality, and so we miss a great measure of the blessedness which is in him as our way. A believer who errs is still saved, but the joy of his salvation is not experienced by him; he is rescued, but not enriched; greatly borne with, but not greatly blessed.

How easily may defilement come upon us even in our holy things, yea, even in the way! We may even come from public or private worship with defilement upon the conscience gathered when we were on our knees. There was no floor to the tabernacle but the desert sand, and hence the priests at the altar were under frequent necessity to wash their feet, and by the kind foresight of their God the laver stood ready for their cleansing, even as for us our Lord Jesus still stands ready to wash our feet, that we may be clean every whit. Thus our text sets forth the blessedness of the apostles in the upper room when Jesus had said of them, "Ye are clean."

What blessedness awaits those who follow the Lamb whithersoever he goeth, and are preserved from the evil which is in the world through lust! These shall be the envy of all mankind "in that day." Though now they despise them as precise fanatics and Puritans, the most prosperous of sinners shall then wish that they could change places with them. O my soul, seek thou thy blessedness in following hard after thy Lord, who was holy, harmless, undefiled; for there hast thou found peace hitherto, and there wilt thou find it for ever.

"Who walk in the law of the Lord." In them is found habitual holiness. Their walk, their common everyday life, is obedience unto the Lord. They live by rule, that rule the command of the Lord God. Whether they eat or drink, or whatsoever they do, they do all in the name of their great Master and Exemplar. To them religion is nothing out of the way, it is their everyday walk; it moulds their common actions as well as their special devotions. This ensures blessedness. He who walks in God's law walks in God's company, and he must be blessed; he has God's smile, God's strength, God's secret with him, and how can he be otherwise than blessed? The holy life is a walk, a steady progress, a quiet advance, a lasting continuance. Enoch walked with God. Good men always long to be better, and hence they go forward. Good men are never idle, and hence they do not lie down or loiter, but they are still walking onward to their desired end. They are not hurried, and worried, and flurried, and so they keep the even tenor of their way, walking steadily towards heaven; and they are not in perplexity as to how to conduct themselves, for they have a perfect rule, which they are happy to walk by. The law of the Lord is not irksome to them; its

commandments are not grievous, and its restrictions are not slavish in their esteem. It does not appear to them to be an impossible law, theoretically admirable, but practically absurd; but they walk by it and in it. They do not consult it now and then as a sort of rectifier of their wanderings, but they use it as a chart for their daily sailing, a map of the road for their life-journey. Nor do they ever regret that they have entered upon the path of obedience, else they would leave it, and that without difficulty, for a thousand temptations offer them opportunity to return; their continued walk in the law of the Lord is their best testimony to the blessedness of such a condition of life. Yes, they are blessed even now. The Psalmist himself bore witness to the fact: he had tried and proved it, and wrote it down as a fact which defied all denial. Here it stands in the forefront of David's magnum opus, written on the topmost line of his greatest Psalm—"Blessed ARE THEY WHO WALK IN THE LAW OF THE Lord." Rough may be the way, stern the rule, hard the discipline—all these we know, and more—but a thousand heaped-up blessednesses are still found in godly living, for which we bless the Lord.

We have in this verse blessed persons who enjoy five blessed things: A blessed way, blessed purity, a blessed law, given by a blessed Lord, and a blessed walk therein; to which we may add the blessed testimony of the Holy Ghost given in this very passage that they are in very deed the blessed of the Lord. The blessedness which is thus set before us we must aim at, but we must not think to obtain it without earnest effort. David has a great deal to say about it; his discourse in this Psalm is long and solemn, and it is a hint to us that the way of perfect obedience is not learned in a day; there must be precept upon precept, line upon line, and after efforts long enough to be compared with the 176 verses of this Psalm, we may still have to cry, "I have gone astray like a lost sheep; seek thy servant; for I do not forget thy commandments."

It must, however, be our plan to keep the word of the Lord much upon our minds; for this discourse upon blessedness has for its pole-star the testimony of the Lord, and only by daily communion with the Lord by his word can we hope to learn his way, to be purged from defilement, and to be made to walk in his statutes. We set out upon this exposition with blessedness before us; we see the way to it, and we know where the law of it is to be found: let us pray that as we pursue our meditation we may grow into the habit and walk of obedience, and so feel the blessedness of which we read.

2. Blessed are they that keep his testimonies, and that seek him with the whole heart.

"Blessed are they that keep his testimonies." What! A second blessing? Yes, they are doubly blessed whose outward life is supported by an inward zeal for God's glory. In the first verse we had an undefiled way, and it was taken for granted that the purity in the way was not mere surface work, but was attended by the inward truth and life which comes of divine grace. Here that which was implied is expressed. Blessedness is ascribed to those who treasure up the testimonies of the Lord; in which is implied that they search the Scriptures, that they come to an understanding of them, that they love them, and then that they continue the practice of them. We must first get a thing before we can keep it. In order to keep it well we must get a firm grip of it: we cannot keep in the heart that which we have not heartily embraced by the affections. God's word is his witness or testimony to grand and important truths which concern himself and our relation to him: this we should desire to know; knowing it, we should believe it; believing it, we should love it; and loving it, we should hold it fast against all comers. There is a doctrinal keeping of the word when we are

ready to die for its defence, and a practical keeping of it when we actually live under its power. Revealed truth is precious as diamonds, and should be kept or treasured up in the memory and in the heart as jewels in a casket, or as the law was kept in the ark; this, however, is not enough; for it is meant for practical use, and therefore it must be kept or followed, as men keep to a path, or to a line of business. If we keep God's testimonies they will keep us; they will keep us right in opinion, comfortable in spirit, holy in conversation, and hopeful in expectation. If they were ever worth having, and no thoughtful person will question that, then they are worth keeping; their designed effect does not come through a temporary seizure of them, but by a persevering keeping of them: "in keeping of them there is great reward."

We are bound to keep with all care the word of God, because it is his testimonies. He gave them to us, but they are still his own. We are to keep them as a watchman guards his master's house, as a steward husbands his lord's goods, as a shepherd keeps his employer's flock. We shall have to give an account, for we are put in trust with the gospel, and woe to us if we be found unfaithful. We cannot fight a good fight, nor finish our course, unless we keep the faith! To this end the Lord must keep us: only those who are kept by the power of God unto salvation will ever be able to keep his testimonies. What a blessedness is therefore evidenced and testified by a careful belief in God's word, and a continual obedience thereunto! God has blessed them, is blessing them, and will bless them for ever. That blessedness which David saw in others he realized for himself, for in verse 168 he says, "I have kept thy precepts and thy testimonies," and in verses 54 to 56 he traces his joyful songs and happy memories to this same keeping of the law, and he confesses, "This I had because I kept thy precepts." Doctrines which we teach to others we should experience for ourselves.

"And that seek him with the whole heart." Those who keep the Lord's testimonies are sure to seek after himself. If his word is precious, we may be sure that he himself is still more so. Personal dealing with a personal God is the longing of all those who have allowed the word of the Lord to have its full effect upon them. If we once really know the power of the gospel, we must seek the God of the gospel. "O that I knew where I might find HIM," will be our wholehearted cry. See the growth which these sentences indicate: first, in the way, then walking in it, then finding and keeping the treasure of truth, and, to crown all, seeking after the Lord of the way himself. Note also, that the further a soul advances in grace the more spiritual and divine are its longings: an outward walk does not content the gracious soul, nor even the treasured testimonies; it reaches out in due time after God himself, and when it in a measure finds him, still yearns for more of him, and seeks him still.

Seeking after God signifies a desire to commune with him more closely, to follow him more fully, to enter into more perfect union with his mind and will, to promote his glory, and to realize completely all that he is to holy hearts. The blessed man has God already, and for this reason he seeks him. This may seem a contradiction: it is only a paradox.

God is not truly sought by the cold researches of the brain: we must seek him with the heart. Love reveals itself to love: God manifests his heart to the heart of his people. It is in vain that we endeavour to comprehend him by reason; we must apprehend him by affection. But the heart must not be divided with many objects if the Lord is to be sought by us. God is one, and we shall not know him till our heart is one. A broken heart need not be distressed at this, for no heart is so

whole in its seekings after God as a heart which is broken, whereof every fragment sighs and cries after the great Father's face. It is the divided heart which the doctrine of the text censures, and, strange to say, in scriptural phraseology, a heart may be divided and not broken, and it may be broken but not divided; and yet again it may be broken and be whole, and it never can be whole until it is broken. When our whole heart seeks the holy God in Christ Jesus it has come to him of whom it is written, "As many as touched him were made perfectly whole." That which the Psalmist admires in this verse he claims in the tenth, where he says, "With my whole heart have I sought thee." It is well when admiration of a virtue leads to the attainment of it. Those who do not believe in the blessedness of seeking the Lord will not be likely to arouse their hearts to the pursuit; but he who calls another blessed because of the grace which he sees in him is on the way to gaining the same grace for himself.

If those who seek the Lord are blessed, what shall be said of those who actually dwell with him and know that he is theirs?

"To those who fall, how kind thou art!

How good to those who seek! But what to those who find? Ah! this Nor tongue nor pen can show: The love of Jesus—what it is, None but his loved ones know."

3. They also do no iniquity; they walk in his ways.

"They also do no iniquity." Blessed indeed would those men be of whom this could be asserted without reserve and without explanation: we shall have reached the region of pure blessedness when we altogether cease from sin. Those who follow the word of God do no iniquity; the rule is perfect, and if it be constantly followed no fault will arise. Life, to the outward observer, at any rate, lies much in doing, and he who in his doings never swerves from equity, both towards God and man, has hit upon the way of perfection, and we may be sure that his heart is right. See how a whole heart leads to the avoidance of evil; for the Psalmist says, "That seek him with the whole heart. They also do no iniquity." We fear that no man can claim to be absolutely without sin; and yet we trust there are many who do not designedly, wilfully, knowingly, and continuously do anything that is wicked, ungodly, or unjust. Grace keeps the life righteous as to act even when the Christian has to bemoan the transgressions of the heart. Judged as men should be judged by their fellows, according to such just rules as men make for men, the true people of God do no iniquity: they are honest, upright, and chaste, and touching justice and morality they are blameless. Therefore are they happy.

"They walk in his ways." They attend not only to the great main highway of the law, but to the smaller paths of the particular precepts. As they will perpetrate no sin of commission, so do they labour to be free from every sin of omission. It is not enough to them to be blameless, they wish also to be actively righteous. A hermit may escape into solitude that he may do no iniquity, but a saint lives in society that he may serve his God by walking in his ways. We must be positively as well as negatively right: we shall not long keep the second unless we attend to the first; for men will be walking one way or another, and if they do not follow the path of God's law they will soon do iniquity. The surest way to abstain from evil is to be fully occupied in doing good. This verse describes believers as they exist among us: although they have their faults and infirmities, yet they hate evil, and will not permit themselves to do it; they love the ways of truth, right and true

godliness, and habitually they walk therein. They do not claim to be absolutely perfect except in their desires, and there they are pure indeed; for they pant to be kept from all sin, and to be led into all holiness. Could they but always walk according to the desire of their renewed hearts, they would follow the Lord Jesus in every thought, and word, and deed of life: yea, their whole being would be incarnate holiness.

4. Thou hast commanded us to keep thy precepts diligently. So that when we have done all, we are unprofitable servants, we have done only that which it was our duty to have done, seeing we have our Lord's command for it. God's precepts require careful obedience: there is no keeping them by accident. Some give to God a careless service, a sort of hit-or-miss obedience; but the Lord has not commanded such service, nor will he accept it. His law demands the love of all our heart, soul, mind, and strength; and a careless religion has none of these. We are also called to zealous obedience. We are to keep the precepts abundantly: the vessels of obedience should be filled to the brim, and the command carried out to the full of its meaning. As a man diligent in business arouses himself to do as much trade as he can, so must we be eager to serve the Lord as much as possible. Nor must we spare pains to do so, for a diligent obedience will also be laborious and self-denying. Those who are diligent in business rise up early and sit up late, and deny themselves much of comfort and repose. They are not soon tired, or, if they are, they persevere even with aching brow and weary eye. So should we serve the Lord. Such a Master deserves diligent servants; such service he demands, and will be content with nothing less. How seldom do men render it! and hence many through their negligence miss the double blessing spoken of in this psalm.

Some are diligent in superstition and will worship; be it ours to be diligent in keeping God's precepts. It is of no use travelling fast if we are not in the right road. Men have been diligent in a losing business, and the more they have traded the more they have lost: this is bad enough in commerce, we cannot afford to have it so in our religion.

God has not commanded us to be diligent in making precepts, but in keeping them. Some bind yokes upon their own necks, and make bonds and rules for others: but the wise course is to be satisfied with the rules of holy Scripture, and to strive to keep them all, in all places, towards all men, and in all respects. If we do not this, we may become eminent in our own religion, but we shall not have kept the command of God, nor shall we be accepted of him. The Psalmist began with the third person: "Blessed are the undefiled." He is now coming near home, and has already reached the first person plural, according to our version: "Thou hast commanded us." We shall soon hear him crying out personally and for himself: "O that my ways were directed!" As the heart glows with love to holiness, we long to have a personal interest in it. The word of God is a heart-affecting book, and when we begin to sing its praises it soon comes home to us, and sets us praying to be ourselves conformed to its teachings. Would not the reader do well to pause here, and by devout meditation impress his own heart with the divine authority of the Scriptures, that so he may devote himself personally to the careful, prayerful, constant, punctual, and cheerful keeping of the precepts of the Lord?

5. O that my ways were directed to keep thy statutes!

Divine commands should direct us in the subject of our prayers. We cannot of ourselves keep God's statutes as he would have them kept, and yet we long to do so: what resort have we but

prayer? We must ask the Lord to work our works in us, or we shall never work out his commandments. This verse is a sigh of regret because the Psalmist feels that he has not kept the precepts diligently, it is a cry of weakness appealing for help to one who can aid, it is a request of bewilderment from one who has lost his way and would fain be directed in it, and it is a petition of faith from one who loves God and trusts in him for grace. Our ways are by nature opposed to the way of God, and must be turned by the Lord's direction in another direction from that which they originally take, or they will lead us down to destruction. God can direct the mind and will without violating our free agency, and he will do so in answer to prayer; in fact, he has begun the work already in those who are heartily praying after the fashion of this verse. It is for present holiness that the desire arises in the heart: oh, that it were so now with me! But future persevering holiness is also meant; for he longs for grace to keep henceforth and for ever the statutes of the Lord. The sigh of the text is really a prayer, though it does not exactly take that form. Desires and longings are of the essence of supplication, and it little matters what shape they take. "Oh, that" is as acceptable a prayer as "Our Father."

One would hardly have expected a prayer for direction; rather should we have looked for a petition for enabling. Can we not direct ourselves? What if we cannot row, we can steer. The Psalmist herein confesses that even for the smallest part of his duty he felt unable without grace. He longed for the Lord to influence his will, as well as to strengthen his hands. We want a rod to point out the way as much as a staff to support us in it. The longing of the text is prompted by admiration of the blessedness of holiness, by a contemplation of the righteous man's beauty of character, and by a reverent awe of the command of God. It is a personal application to the writer's own case of the truths which he had been considering. "O that my ways were directed to keep thy statutes!" It were well if all who hear the word would copy this example and turn all that they hear into prayer. We should have more keepers of the statutes if we had more who sigh and cry after the grace which alone can keep them from wandering.

6. Then shall I not be ashamed, when I have respect unto all thy commandments.

"Then shall I not be ashamed." He had known shame, and here he rejoices in the prospect of being freed from it. Sin brings shame, and when sin is gone, the reason for being ashamed is banished. What a deliverance this is; for to some men death is preferable to shame! "When I have respect unto all thy commandments." When he respects God he shall respect himself and be respected. Whenever we err we prepare ourselves for confusion of face and sinking of heart: if no one else is ashamed of me, I shall be ashamed of myself if I do iniquity. Our first parents never knew shame till they made the acquaintance of the old serpent, and it never left them till their gracious God had covered them with sacrificial skins. Disobedience made them naked and ashamed. We, ourselves, will always have cause for shame till every sin is vanquished, and every duty is observed. When we pay a continual and universal respect to the will of the Lord, then we shall be able to look ourselves in the face in the looking-glass of the law, and we shall not blush at the sight of men or devils, however eager their malice may be to lay somewhat to our charge.

Many suffer from excessive diffidence, and this verse suggests a cure. An abiding sense of duty will make us bold, we shall be afraid to be afraid. No shame in the presence of man will hinder us when the fear of God has taken full possession of our minds. When we are on the king's highway by daylight, and are engaged upon royal business, we need ask no man's leave. It would be a

dishonour to a king to be ashamed of his livery and his service; no such shame should ever crimson the cheek of a Christian, nor will it if he has due reverence for the Lord his God. There is nothing to be ashamed of in a holy life: a man may be ashamed of his pride, ashamed of his wealth, ashamed of his own children; but he will never be ashamed of having in all things regarded the will of the Lord his God.

It is worthy of remark that David promises himself no immunity from shame till he has carefully paid homage to all the precepts. Mind that word "all" and leave not one command out of your respect. Partial obedience still leaves us liable to be called to account for those commands which we have neglected. A man may have a thousand virtues, and yet a single failing may cover him with shame. To a poor sinner who is buried in despair, it may seem a very unlikely thing that he should ever be delivered from shame. He blushes, and is confounded, and feels that he can never lift up his face again. Let him read these words: "Then shall I not be ashamed." David is not dreaming, nor picturing an impossible case. Be assured, dear friend, that the Holy Spirit can renew in you the image of God, so that you shall yet look up without fear. O for sanctification, to direct us in God's way; for then shall we have boldness both towards God and his people, and shall no more crimson with confusion.

Dr. Watts turns this passage into admirable rhyme: let us sing with him—

"Then shall my heart have inward joy, And keep my face from shame, When all thy statutes I obey, And honour all thy name."

7. I will praise thee with uprightness of heart, when I shall have learned thy righteous judgments.

"I will praise thee." From prayer to praise is never a long or a difficult journey. Be sure that he who prays for holiness will one day praise for happiness. Shame having vanished, silence is broken, and the formerly silent man declares, "I will praise thee." He cannot but promise praise while he seeks sanctification. Mark how well he knows upon what head to set the crown. "I will praise thee." He would himself be praiseworthy, but he counts God alone worthy of praise. By the sorrow and shame of sin he measures his obligations to the Lord, who would teach him the art of living so that he should clean escape from his former misery.

"With uprightness of heart." His heart would be upright if the Lord would teach him, and then it would praise its teacher. There is such a thing as false and feigned praise, and this the Lord abhors; but there is no music like that which comes from a pure soul which standeth in its integrity. Heart praise is required, uprightness in that heart, and teaching to make the heart upright. An upright heart is sure to bless the Lord; for grateful adoration is a part of its uprightness: no man can be right unless he is upright towards God, and this involves the rendering to him the praise which is his due.

"When I shall have learned thy righteous judgments." We must learn to praise, learn that we may praise, and praise when we have learned. If we are ever to learn, the Lord must teach us, and especially upon such a subject as his judgments, for they are a great deep. While these are passing before our eyes, and we are learning from them, we ought to praise God; for the original is not, "when I have learned," but, "in my learning." While yet I am a scholar I will be a chorister: my upright heart shall praise thine uprightness, my purified judgment shall admire thy judgments. God's providence is a book full of teaching, and to those whose hearts are right it is a music-book,

out of which they chant to Jehovah's praise. God's word is full of the record of his righteous providences, and as we read it we feel compelled to burst forth into expressions of holy delight and ardent praise. When we both read of God's judgments and become joyful partakers in them, we are doubly moved to song—song in which there is neither formality, nor hypocrisy, nor lukewarmness; for the heart is upright in the presentation of its praise.

8. I will keep thy statutes: O forsake me not utterly.

"I will keep thy statutes." A calm resolve. When praise calms down into solid resolution it is well with the soul. Zeal which spends itself in singing, and leaves no practical residuum of holy living, is little worth: "I will praise" should be coupled with "I will keep." This firm resolve is by no means boastful, like Peter's "though I should die with thee, yet will I not deny thee"; for it is followed by a humble prayer for divine help: "O forsake me not utterly." Feeling his own incapacity, he trembles lest he should be left to himself, and this fear is increased by the horror which he has of falling into sin. The "I will keep" sounds rightly enough now that the humble cry is heard with it. This is a happy amalgam: resolution and dependence. We meet with those who to all appearance humbly pray, but there is no force of character, no decision in them, and consequently the pleading of the closet is not embodied in the life: on the other hand, we meet with abundance of resolve attended with an entire absence of dependence upon God, and this makes as poor a character as the former. The Lord grant us to have such a blending of excellences that we may be "perfect and entire, wanting nothing." This prayer is one which is certain to be heard; for assuredly it must be highly pleasing to God to see a man set upon obeying his will, and therefore it must be most agreeable to him to be present with such a person, and to help him in his endeavours. How can he forsake one who does not forsake his law? The peculiar dread which tinges this prayer with a sombre hue is the fear of utter forsaking. Well may the soul cry out against such a calamity. To be left, that we may discover our weakness, is a sufficient trial: to be altogether forsaken would be ruin and death. Hiding the face in a little wrath for a moment brings us very low: an absolute desertion would plunge us ultimately in the lowest hell. But the Lord never has utterly forsaken his servants, and he never will, blessed be his name. If we long to keep his statutes he will keep us; yea, his grace will keep us keeping his law.

There is rather a sharp descent from the mount of benediction, with which the first verse began, to the almost wail of this eighth verse, yet this is spiritually and experimentally a decided and gracious growth; for from admiration of goodness we have come to a burning longing after God, pining after communion with him, and an intense horror lest it should not be enjoyed. The sigh of verse 5 is now supplanted by an actual prayer from the depths of a heart conscious of its undesert, and sensible of its entire dependence upon divine love. The two "I wills"—"I will praise thee," and "I will keep thy statutes"—needed to be seasoned with some such lowly petition, or it might have been thought that the good man's dependence was in some degree fixed upon his own determination. He presents his resolutions like a sacrifice, but he cries to heaven for the fire. To will is present with him, but he cannot perform that which he would unless the Lord will abide with him. This last verse of the first octave has a link with the first of the next in this fashion: Lord, do not forsake me, for wherewith shall I cleanse my way if thou be gone from me, and thy law ceases to have power over me?

Exposition of Psalm 119:9-16

Exposition of Psalms 119:9-16 9. Wherewithal shall a young man cleanse his way? by taking heed thereto according to thy word.

"Wherewithal shall a young man cleanse his way?" How shall he become and remain practically holy? He is but a young man, full of hot passions, and poor in knowledge and experience; how shall he get right, and keep right? Never was there a more important question for any man; never was there a fitter time for asking it than at the commencement of life. It is by no means an easy task which the prudent young man sets before himself. He wishes to choose a clean way, to be himself clean in it, to cleanse it of any foulness which may arise in the future, and to end by showing a clear course from the first step to the last; but, alas! his way is already unclean by actual sin which he has already committed, and he himself has already within his nature a tendency towards that which defileth. Here, then, is the difficulty; first, of beginning aright; next, of being always able to know and choose the right, and of continuing in the right till perfection is ultimately reached: this is hard for any man, how shall a youth accomplish it? The way, or life, of a man has to be cleansed from the sins of his youth behind him, and kept clear of the sins which temptation will place before him: this is the work, this is the difficulty. No nobler ambition can lie before a youth, none to which he is called by so sure a calling; but none in which greater difficulties can be found. Let him not, however, shrink from the glorious enterprise of living a pure and gracious life; rather let him enquire the way by which all obstacles may be overcome. Let him not think that he knows the road to easy victory, nor dream that he can keep himself by his own wisdom; he will do well to follow the Psalmist, and become an earnest enquirer asking how he may cleanse his way. Let him become a practical disciple of the holy God, who alone can teach him how to overcome the world, the flesh, and the devil, that trinity of defilers by whom many a hopeful life has been spoiled. He is young and unaccustomed to the road, let him not be ashamed often to enquire his way of him who is so ready and so able to instruct him in it. Our "way" is a subject which concerns us deeply, and it is far better to enquire about it than to speculate upon mysterious themes which rather puzzle than enlighten the mind. Among all the questions which a young man asks, and they are many, let this be the first and chief: "Wherewithal shall I cleanse my way?" This is a question suggested by common sense, and pressed home by daily occurrences; but it is not to be answered by unaided reason, nor, when answered, can the directions be carried out by unsupported human power. It is ours to ask the question, it is God's to give the answer and enable us to carry it out.

"By taking heed thereto according to thy word."

Young man, the Bible must be your chart, and you must exercise great watchfulness that your way may be according to its directions. You must take heed to your daily life as well as study your Bible, and you must study your Bible that you may take heed to your daily life. With the greatest care a man will go astray if his map misleads him; but with the most accurate map he will still lose his road if he does not take heed to it. The narrow way was never hit upon by chance, neither did

any heedless man ever lead a holy life. We can sin without thought, we have only to neglect the great salvation and ruin our souls; but to obey the Lord and walk uprightly will need all our heart and soul and mind. Let the careless remember this.

Yet the "word" is absolutely necessary; for, otherwise, care will darken into morbid anxiety, and conscientiousness may become superstition. A captain may watch from his deck all night; but if he knows nothing of the coast, and has no pilot on board, he may be carefully hastening on to shipwreck. It is not enough to desire to be right; for ignorance may make us think that we are doing God service when we are provoking him, and the fact of our ignorance will not reverse the character of our action, however much it may mitigate its criminality. Should a man carefully measure out what he believes to be a dose of useful medicine, he will die if it should turn out that he has taken up the wrong vial, and has poured out a deadly poison: the fact that he did it ignorantly will not alter the result. Even so, a young man may surround himself with ten thousand ills, by carefully using an unenlightened judgment, and refusing to receive instruction from the word of God. Wilful ignorance is in itself wilful sin, and the evil which comes of it is without excuse. Let each man, whether young or old, who desires to be holy have a holy watchfulness in his heart, and keep his Holy Bible before his open eye. There he will find every turn of the road marked down, every slough and miry place pointed out, with the way to go through unsoiled; and there, too, he will find light for his darkness, comfort for his weariness, and company for his loneliness, so that by its help he shall reach the benediction of the first verse of the psalm, which suggested the Psalmist's enquiry, and awakened his desires.

Note how the first section of eight verses has for its first verse, "Blessed are the undefiled in the way," and the second section runs parallel to it, with the question, "Wherewithal shall a young man cleanse his way?" The blessedness which is set before us in a conditional promise should be practically sought for in the way appointed. The Lord saith, "For this will I be enquired of by the house of Israel to do it for them." The sooner we avail ourselves of a promise of God the better, especially as our early days enjoy peculiar encouragement! for Wisdom hath said, "They that seek me early shall find me." It is a pity to miss for a year, or even a day or an hour, the blessedness which belongs to holiness.

10. With my whole heart have I sought thee: O let me not wander from thy commandments.

"With my whole heart have I sought thee." His heart had gone after God himself: he had not only desired to obey his laws, but to commune with his person. This is a right royal search and pursuit, and well may it be followed with the whole heart. The surest mode of cleansing the way of our life is to seek after God himself, and to endeavour to abide in fellowship with him. Up to the good hour in which he was speaking to his Lord, the Psalmist had been an eager seeker after the Lord, and if faint, he was still pursuing. Had he not sought the Lord he would never have been so anxious to cleanse his way.

It is pleasant to see how the writer's heart turns distinctly and directly to God. He had been considering an important truth in the preceding verse, but here he so powerfully feels the presence of his God that he speaks to him, and prays to him, as to one who is near. A true heart cannot long live without fellowship with God. His petition is founded on his life's purpose: he is seeking the Lord, and he prays the Lord to prevent his going astray in or from his search. It is by obedience that we follow after God: hence the prayer, "O let me not wander from thy commandments"; for if

we leave the ways of God's appointment, we certainly shall not find the God who appointed them. The more a man's whole heart is set upon holiness the more does he dread falling into sin; he is not so much fearful of deliberate transgression as of inadvertent wandering: he cannot endure a wandering look, or a rambling thought, which might stray beyond the pale of the precept. We are to be such wholehearted seekers that we have neither time nor will to be wanderers; and yet with all our whole-heartedness we are to cultivate a jealous fear lest even then we should wander from the path of holiness.

Two things may be very like and yet altogether different: saints are "strangers"—"I am a stranger in the earth" (verse 19), but they are not wanderers: they are passing through an enemy's country, but their route is direct; they are seeking their Lord while they traverse this foreign land. Their way is hidden from men; but yet they have not lost their way. The man of God exerts himself, but does not trust himself: his heart is in his walking with God; but he knows that even his whole strength is not enough to keep him right unless his King shall be his keeper, and he who made the commands shall make him constant in obeying them: hence the prayer, "O let me not wander." Still, this sense of need was never turned into an argument for idleness; for while he prayed to be kept in the right road he took care to run in it, with his whole heart seeking the Lord.

Note how the second part of the psalm keeps step with the first: where verse 2 pronounces that man to be blessed who seeks the Lord with his whole heart, the present verse claims the blessing by pleading the character: "With my whole heart have I sought thee."

11. Thy word have I hid in mine heart, that I might not sin against thee. When a godly man sues for a favour from God he should carefully use every means for obtaining it, and accordingly, as the Psalmist had asked to be preserved from wandering, he here shows us the holy precaution which he had taken to prevent his falling into sin. "Thy word have I hid in mine heart." His heart would be kept by the word because he kept the word in his heart. All that he had of the word written, and all that had been revealed to him by the voice of God,—all, without exception, he had stored away in his affections, as a treasure to be preserved in a casket, or as a choice seed to be buried in a fruitful soil: what soil more fruitful than a renewed heart, wholly seeking the Lord? The word was God's own, and therefore precious to God's servant. He did not wear a text on his heart as a charm, but he hid it in his heart as a rule. He laid it up in the place of love and life, and it filled the chamber with sweetness and light. We must in this imitate David, copying his heart-work as well as his outward character. First, we must mind that what we believe is truly God's word; that being done, we must hide or treasure it each man for himself; and we must see that this is done, not as a mere feat of the memory, but as the joyful act of the affections.

"That I might not sin against thee." Here was the object aimed at. As one has well said,—Here is the best thing,—"thy word"; hidden in the best place,— "in my heart"; for the best of purposes,—"that I might not sin against thee." This was done by the Psalmist with personal care, as a man carefully hides away his money when he fears thieves: in this case the thief dreaded was sin. Sinning "against God" is the believer's view of moral evil; other men care only when they offend against men. God's word is the best preventive against offending God, for it tells us his mind and will, and tends to bring our spirit into conformity with the divine Spirit. No cure for sin in the life is equal to the word in the seat of life, which is the heart. A very pleasant variety of meaning is obtained by laying stress upon the words "thy" and "thee." He speaks to God, he loves the word

because it is Gods word, and he hates sin because it is sin against God himself. If he vexed others, he minded not so long as he did not offend his God. If we would not cause God displeasure we must treasure up his own word. The personal way in which the man of God did this is also noteworthy: "With my whole heart have I sought thee." Whatever others might choose to do, he had already made his choice, and placed the Word in his innermost soul as his dearest delight; and however others might transgress, his aim was after holiness: "That I might not sin against thee." This was not what he proposed to do, but what he had already done: many are great at promising, but the Psalmist had been true in performing: hence he hoped to see a sure result. When the word is hidden in the heart the life shall be hidden from sin. The parallelism between the second octave and the first is still continued. Verse 3 speaks of doing no iniquity, while this verse treats of the method of not sinning. When we form an idea of a blessedly holy man (verse 3), it becomes us to make an earnest effort to attain unto the same sacred innocence and divine happiness; and this can only be through heart-piety founded on the Scriptures.

12. "Blessed art thou, O Lord: teach me thy statutes."

"Blessed art thou, O Lord." These are words of adoration arising out of an intense admiration of the divine character, which the writer is humbly aiming to imitate. He blesses God for all that he has revealed to him, and wrought in him; he praises him with warmth of reverent love, and depth of holy wonder. These are also words of perception uttered from a remembrance of the great Jehovah's infinite happiness within himself. The Lord is and must be blessed, for he is the perfection of holiness; and this is probably the reason why this is used as a plea in this place. It is as if David had said: I see that in conformity to thyself my way to happiness must lie, for thou art supremely blessed; and if I am made in my measure like to thee in holiness, I shall also partake in thy blessedness. No sooner is the word in the heart than a desire arises to mark and learn it. When food is eaten, the next thing is to digest it; and when the word is received into the soul the first prayer is—Lord, teach me its meaning. "Teach me thy statutes"; for thus only can I learn the way to be blessed. Thou art so blessed that I am sure thou wilt delight in blessing others; and this boon I crave of thee that I may be instructed in thy commands. Happy men usually rejoice to make others happy; and surely the happy God will willingly impart the holiness which is the fountain of happiness. Faith prompted this prayer, and based it, not upon anything in the praying man, but solely upon the perfection of the God to whom he made supplication. Lord, thou art blessed, therefore bless me by teaching me.

We need to be disciples or learners—"teach me"; but what an honour to have God himself for a teacher! How bold is David, to beg the blessed God to teach him! Yet the Lord put the desire into his heart when the sacred word was hidden there, and so we may be sure that he was not too bold in expressing it. Who would not wish to enter the school of such a Master to learn of him the art of holy living? To this Instructor we must submit ourselves if we would practically keep the statutes of righteousness. The King who ordained the statutes knows best their meaning, and as they are the outcome of his own nature he can best inspire us with their spirit. The petition commends itself to all who wish to cleanse their way, since it is most practical, and asks for teaching, not upon recondite lore, but upon statute-law. If we know the Lord's statutes, we have the most essential education.

Let us each one say, "Teach me thy statutes." This is a sweet prayer for everyday use. It is a step above that of verse 10, "O let me not wander," as that was a rise beyond that of 8, "O forsake me not utterly." It finds its answer in verses 98-100: "Thou through thy commandments hast made me wiser than mine enemies," etc.; but not till it had been repeated even to the third time in the "Teach me" of verses 33 and 66, all of which I beg my reader to peruse. Even after this third pleading, the prayer occurs again in so many words in verses 124 and 139, and the same longing comes out near the close of the psalm in verse 171—"My lips shall utter praise when thou hast taught me thy statutes."

13. With my lips have I declared all the judgments of thy mouth. The taught one of verse 12 is here a teacher himself. What we learn in secret we are to proclaim upon the housetops. So had the Psalmist done. As much as he had known he had spoken. God has revealed many of his judgments by his mouth, that is to say, by a plain and open revelation; these it is our duty to repeat, becoming, as it were, so many exact echoes of his one infallible voice. There are judgments of God which are a great deep, which he does not reveal, and with these it will be wise for us not to intermeddle. What the Lord has veiled it would be presumption for us to uncover; but, on the other hand, what the Lord has revealed it would be shameful for us to conceal. It is a great comfort to a Christian in time of trouble when in looking back upon his past life he can claim to have done his duty by the word of God. To have been, like Noah, a preacher of righteousness, is a great joy when the floods are rising, and the ungodly world is about to be destroyed. Lips which have been used in proclaiming God's statutes are sure to be acceptable when pleading God's promises. If we have had such regard to that which cometh out of God's mouth that we have published it far and wide, we may rest quite assured that God will have respect unto the prayers which come out of our mouths.

It will be an effectual method of cleansing a young man's way if he addicts himself continually to preaching the gospel. He cannot go far wrong in judgment whose whole soul is occupied in setting forth the judgments of the Lord. By teaching we learn; by training the tongue to holy speech we master the whole body; by familiarity with the divine procedure we are made to delight in righteousness; and thus in a threefold manner our way is cleansed by our proclaiming the way of the Lord.

What a joy to any man to be able to look back upon a faithful testimony to divine truth! When weary with Sabbath services, how sweet to feel that we have spoken, not our own words, but the teachings of divine revelation! When we shall come to die, it will be no mean consolation that we have "kept the faith." Christ will surely plead for those whose lives are spent in pleading for him.

14. I have rejoiced in the way of thy testimonies, as much as in all riches.

Delight in the word of God is a sure proof that it has taken effect upon the heart, and so is cleansing the life. The Psalmist not only says that he does rejoice, but that he has rejoiced. For years it had been his joy and bliss to give his soul to the teaching of the word. His rejoicing had not only arisen out of the word of God, but out of the practical characteristics of it. The way was as dear to him as the Truth and the Life. There was no picking and choosing with David, or if indeed he did make a selection, he chose the most practical first. "As much as in all riches." He compared his intense satisfaction with God's will with that of a man who possesses large and varied estates, and the heart to enjoy them. David knew the riches that come of sovereignty, and which grow out of

conquest; he valued the wealth which proceeds from labour, or is gotten by inheritance: he knew "all riches." The gracious king had been glad to see the gold and silver poured into his treasury that he might devote vast masses of it to the building of the Temple of Jehovah upon Mount Zion. He rejoiced in all sorts of riches consecrated and laid up for the noblest uses, and yet the way of God's word had given him more pleasure than even these. Observe that his joy was personal, distinct, remembered, and abundant. Wonder not that in the previous verse he glories in having spoken much of that which he had so much enjoyed: a man may well talk of that which is his delight.

15. I will meditate in thy precepts, and have respect unto thy ways.

"I will meditate in thy precepts." He who has an inward delight in anything will not long withdraw his mind from it. As the miser often returns to look upon his treasure, so does the devout believer, by frequent meditation, turn over the priceless wealth which he has discovered in the Book of the Lord. To some men meditation is a task; to the man of cleansed way it is a joy. He who has meditated will meditate; he who saith, "I have rejoiced," is the same who adds, "I will meditate." No spiritual exercise is more profitable to the soul than that of devout meditation; why are many of us so exceeding slack in it? It is worthy of observation that the preceptory part of God's word was David's special subject of meditation; and this was the more natural because the question was still upon his mind as to how a young man should cleanse his way. Practical godliness is vital godliness.

"And have respect unto thy ways," that is to say, I will think much about them, so as to know what thy ways are; and next, I will think much of them, so as to have thy ways in great reverence and high esteem. I will see what thy ways are towards me, that I may be filled with reverence, gratitude and love; and then I will observe what are those ways which thou hast prescribed for me, thy ways in which thou wouldst have me follow thee; these I would watch carefully, that I may become obedient, and prove myself to be a true servant of such a Master.

Note how the verses grow more inward as they proceed: from the speech of verse 13 we advanced to the manifested joy of verse 14; and now we come to the secret meditation of the happy spirit. The richest graces are those which dwell deepest.

16. I will delight myself in thy statutes: I will not forget thy word.

"I will delight myself in thy statutes." In this verse delight follows meditation, of which it is the true flower and outgrowth. When we have no other solace, but are quite alone, it will be a glad thing for the heart to turn upon itself, and sweetly whisper, "I will delight myself. What if no minstrel sings in the hall; I will delight myself. If the time of the singing of birds has not yet arrived, and the voice of the turtle is not heard in our land, yet I will delight myself." This is the choicest and noblest of all rejoicing; in fact, it is the good part which can never be taken from us; but there is no delighting ourselves with anything below that which God intended to be the soul's eternal satisfaction. The statute-book is intended to be the joy of every loyal subject. When the believer once peruses the sacred pages, his soul burns within him as he turns first to one and then to another of the royal words of the great King—words full and firm, immutable and divine.

"I will not forget thy word." Men do not readily forget that which they have treasured up (verse 14), that which they have meditated on (verse 15), and that which they have often spoken of (verse 13).

Yet since we have treacherous memories, it is well to bind them well with the knotted cord of "I will not forget."

Note how two "I wills" (verses 13 and 14) follow upon two "I haves." We may not dare to promise for the future if we have altogether failed in the past; but where grace has enabled us to accomplish something, we may hopefully expect that it will enable us to do more.

Action repeated becomes habit, and when habits are well formed we may without boasting resolve to maintain them, and even to engraft upon them other and higher exercises. Yet it is well never to let our I wills of resolves exceed our I haves of actual performance.

It is curious to observe how this sixteenth verse is moulded upon verse 8: the changes are rung on the same words, but the meaning is quite different, and there is no suspicion of a vain repetition. The same thought is never given over again in this psalm: they are dullards who think so. Something in the position of each verse affects its meaning, so that even where its words are almost identical with those of another, the sense is delightfully varied. If we do not see an infinite variety of fine shades of thought in this psalm, we may conclude that we are colour-blind; if we do not hear many sweet harmonies, we may judge our ears to be dull of hearing, but we may not suspect the Spirit of God of monotony.

Exposition of Psalm 119:17-24

Exposition of Verses 17 to 24 17. DEAL bountifully with thy servant, that I may live, and keep thy word.

18. Open thou mine eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of thy law.

19. I am a stranger in the earth: hide not thy commandments from me.

20. My soul breaketh for the longing that it hath unto thy judgments at all times.

21. Thou hast rebuked the proud that are cursed, which do err from thy commandments.

22. Remove from me reproach and contempt; for I have kept thy testimonies.

23. Princes also did sit and speak against me: but thy servant did meditate in thy statutes.

24. Thy testimonies also are my delight and my counsellors. In this section the trials of the way appear to be manifest to the Psalmist's mind, and he prays accordingly for the help which will meet his case. As in the last eight verses he prayed as a youth newly come into the world, so here he pleads as a servant and a pilgrim, who growingly finds himself to be a stranger in an enemy's country. His appeal is to God alone, and his prayer is specially direct and personal. He speaks with the Lord as a man speaketh with his friend.

17. Deal bountifully with thy servant, that I may live, and keep thy word.

"Deal bountifully with thy servant." He takes pleasure in owning his duty to God, and counts it the joy of his heart to be in the service of his God. Out of his condition he makes a plea, for a servant has some hold upon a master; but in this case the wording of the plea shuts out the idea of legal claim, since he seeks bounty rather than reward. Let my wage be according to thy goodness, and not according to my merit. Reward me according to the largeness of thy liberality, and not according to the scantiness of my service. The hired servants of our Father have all of them bread enough and to spare, and he will not leave one of his household to perish with hunger. If the Lord will only treat us as he treats the least of his servants we may be well content; for all his true servants are sons, princes of the blood, heirs of life eternal. David felt that his great needs required a bountiful provision, and that his little desert would never earn such a supply; hence he must throw himself upon God's grace, and look for the great things he needed from the great goodness of the Lord. He begs for a liberality of grace, after the fashion of one who prayed, "O Lord, thou must give me great mercy or no mercy, for little mercy will not serve my turn."

"That I may live." Without abundant mercy he could not live. It takes great grace to keep a saint alive. Even life is a gift of divine bounty to such undeserving ones as we are. Only the Lord can keep us in being, and it is mighty grace which preserves to us the life which we have forfeited by our sin. It is right to desire to live, it is meet to pray to live, it is just to ascribe prolonged life to the favour of God. Spiritual life, without which this natural life is mere existence, is also to be sought of the Lord's bounty; for it is the noblest work of divine grace, and in it the bounty of God is gloriously

displayed. The Lord's servants cannot serve him in their own strength, for they cannot even live unless his grace abounds towards them.

"And keep thy word." This should be the rule, the object, and the joy of our life. We may not wish to live and sin; but we may pray to live and keep God's word. Being is a poor thing if it be not well-being. Life is only worth keeping while we can keep God's word; indeed, there is no life in the highest sense apart from holiness: life while we break the law is but a name to live. The prayer of this verse shows that it is only through divine bounty or grace that we can live as faithful servants of God, and manifest obedience to his commands. If we give God service it must be because he gives us grace. We work for him because he works in us. Thus we may make a chain out of the opening verses of the three first octaves of this psalm: verse 1 blesses the holy man, verse 9 asks how we can attain to such holiness, and verse 17 traces such holiness to its secret source, and shows us how to seek the blessing. The more a man prizes holiness, and the more earnestly he strives after it, the more will he be driven towards God for help therein; for he will plainly perceive that his own strength is insufficient, and that he cannot even so much as live without the bounteous assistance of the Lord his God.

18. Open thou mine eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of thy law.

"Open thou mine eyes." This is a part of the bountiful dealing which he has asked for; no bounty is greater than that which benefits our person, our soul, our mind, and benefits it in so important an organ as the eye. It is far better to have the eyes opened than to be placed in the midst of the noblest prospects and remain blind to their beauty. "That I may behold wondrous things out of thy law." Some men can perceive no wonders in the gospel, but David felt sure that there were glorious things in the law: he had not half the Bible, but he prized it more than some men prize the whole. He felt that God had laid up great beauties and bounties in his word, and he begs for power to perceive, appreciate, and enjoy the same. We need not so much that God should give us more benefits, as the ability to see what he has given. The prayer implies a conscious darkness, a dimness of spiritual vision, a powerlessness to remove that defect, and a full assurance that God can remove it. It shows also that the writer knew that there were vast treasures in the word which he had not yet fully seen, marvels which he had not yet beheld, mysteries which he had scarcely believed. The Scriptures teem with marvels; the Bible is wonder-land; it not only relates miracles, but it is itself a world of wonders. Yet what are these to closed eyes? And what man can open his own eyes, since he is born blind? God himself must reveal revelation to each heart. Scripture needs opening, but not one half so much as our eyes do; the veil is not on the book, but on our hearts. What perfect precepts, what precious promises, what priceless privileges are neglected by us, because we wander among them like blind men among the beauties of nature, and they are to us as a landscape shrouded in darkness! The Psalmist had a measure of spiritual perception, or he would never have known that there were wondrous things to be seen, nor would he have prayed, "Open thou mine eyes"; but what he had seen made him long for a clearer and wider sight. This longing proved the genuineness of what he possessed, for it is a test mark of the true knowledge of God that it causes its possessor to thirst for deeper knowledge.

David's prayer in this verse is a good sequel to verse 10, which corresponds to it in position in its octave: there he said, "O let me not wander"; and who so apt to wander as a blind man? and there, too, he declared, "With my whole heart have I sought thee"; and hence the desire to see the object

of his search. Very singular are the interfacings of the loughs of the huge tree of this psalm, which has many wonders even within itself if we have opened eyes to mark them.

19. I am a stranger in the earth: hide not thy commandments from me.

"I am a stranger in the earth." This is meant for a plea. By divine command men are bound to be kind to strangers, and what God commands in others he will exemplify in himself. The Psalmist was a stranger for God's sake, else had he been as much at home as worldlings are: he was not a stranger to God, but a stranger to the world, a banished man so long as he was out of heaven. Therefore he pleads, "Hide not thy commandments from me." If these are gone, what have I else? Since nothing around me is mine, what can I do if I lose thy word? Since none around me know or care to know the way to thyself, what shall I do if I fail to see thy commands, by which alone I can guide my steps to the land where thou dwellest? David implies that God's commands were his solace in his exile: they reminded him of home, and they showed him the way thither, and therefore he begged that they might never be hidden from him, by his being unable either to understand them or to obey them. If spiritual light be withdrawn, the command is hidden, and this a gracious heart greatly deprecates. What would be the use of opened eyes if the best object of sight were hidden from their view? While we wander here we can endure all the ills of this foreign land with patience, if the word of God is applied to our hearts by the Spirit of God; but if the heavenly things which make for our peace were hid from our eyes, we should be in an evil case—in fact, we should be at sea without a compass, in a desert without a guide, in an enemy's country without a friend. This prayer is a supplement to "Open thou mine eyes," and as the one prays to see, the other deprecates the negative of seeing, namely the command being hidden, and so out of sight. We do well to look at both sides of the blessing we are seeking, and to plead for it from every point of view. The prayers are appropriate to the characters mentioned: as he is a servant, he asks for opened eyes that his eyes may ever be towards his Lord, as the eyes of a servant should be; as a stranger, he begs that he may not be strange to the way in which he is to walk towards his home. In each case his entire dependence is upon God alone.

Note how the third of the second octave (11) has the same keyword as this third of the third octave: "Thy word have I hid," "Hide not thy commandments from me." This invites a meditation upon the different senses of hiding in and hiding from.

20. My soul breaketh for the longing that it hath unto thy judgments at all times.

True godliness lies very much in desires. As we are not what we shall be, so also we are not what we would be. The desires of gracious men after holiness are intense; or they cause a wear of heart, a straining of the mind, till it feels ready to snap with the heavenly pull. A high value of the Lord's commandment leads to a pressing desire to know and to do it, and this so weighs upon the soul that it is ready to break in pieces under the crush of its own longings. What a blessing it is when all our desires are after the things of God! We may well long for such longings.

God's judgments are his decisions upon points which else had been in dispute. Every precept is a judgment of the highest court upon a point of action, an infallible and immutable decision upon a moral or spiritual question. The word of God is a code of justice from which there is no appeal.

"This is the Judge which ends the strife Where wit and reason fail; Our guide through devious paths of life, Our shield when doubts assail."

David had such reverence for the Word, and such a desire to know it, and to be conformed to it, that his longings caused him a sort of heartbreak, which he here pleads before God. Longing is the soul of praying, and when the soul longs till it breaks, it cannot be long before the blessing will be granted. The most intimate communion between the soul and its God is carried on by the process described in the text. God reveals his will, and our heart longs to be conformed thereto. God judges, and our heart rejoices in the verdict. This is fellowship of heart most real and thorough.

Note well that our desire after the mind of God should be constant; we should feel holy longings "at all times." Desires which can be put off and on like our garments are at best but mere wishes, and possibly they are hardly true enough to be called by that name,—they are temporary emotions born of excitement, and doomed to die when the heat which created them has cooled down. He who always longs to know and do the right is the truly right man. His judgment is sound, for he loves all God's judgments, and follows them with constancy. His times shall be good, since he longs to be good and to do good at all times.

Remark how this fourth of the third eight chimes with the fourth of the fourth eight "My soul breaketh"; "My soul melteth." There is surely some recondite poetic art about all this, and it is well for us to be careful in studying what the Psalmist was so careful in composing.

21. Thou hast rebuked the proud that are cursed, which do err from thy commandments.

"Thou hast rebuked the proud that are cursed." This is one of God's judgments: he is sure to deal out a terrible portion to men of lofty looks. God rebuked Pharaoh with sore plagues, and at the Red Sea "the foundations of the world were discovered at thy rebuke, O Lord." In the person of the haughty Egyptian he taught all the proud that he will certainly abase them. Proud men are cursed men: nobody blesses them, and they soon become a burden to themselves. In itself, pride is a plague and torment. Even if no curse came from the law of God, there seems to be a law of nature that proud men should be unhappy men. This led David to abhor pride; he dreaded the rebuke of God and the curse of the law. The proud sinners of his day were his enemies, and he felt happy that God was in the quarrel as well as he.

"Which do err from thy commandments." Only humble hearts are obedient, for they alone will yield to rule and government. Proud men's looks are high, too high to mark their own feet and keep the Lord's way. Pride lies at the root of all sin: if men were not arrogant they would not be disobedient.

God rebukes pride even when the multitudes pay homage to it, for he sees it in rebellion against his own majesty, and the seeds of yet further rebellions. It is the sum of sin. Men talk of an honest pride; but if they were candid they would see that it is of all sins the least honest, and the least becoming in a creature, and especially in a fallen creature: yet so little do proud men know their own true condition under the curse of God, that they set up to censure the godly, and express contempt for them, as may be seen in the next verse. They are themselves contemptible, and yet they are contemptuous towards their betters. We may well love the judgments of God, when we see them so decisively levelled against the haughty upstarts who would fain lord it over righteous men; and we may well be of good comfort under the rebukes of the ungodly, since their power to hurt us is destroyed by the Lord himself. "The Lord rebuke thee" is answer enough for all the accusations of men or devils. In the fifth of the former octave the Psalmist wrote, "I have declared all the judgments of thy mouth," and here he continues in the same strain, giving a particular

instance of the Lord's judgments against haughty rebels. In the next two portions the fifth verses deal with lying and vanity, and pride is one of the most common forms of those evils.

22. Remove from me reproach and contempt; for I have kept thy testimonies.

"Remove from me reproach and contempt." These are painful things to tender minds. David could bear them for righteousness' sake, but they were a heavy yoke, and he longed to be free from them. To be slandered, and then to be despised in consequence of the vile accusation, is a grievous affliction. No one likes to be traduced, or even to be despised. He who says, "I care nothing for my reputation," is not a wise man; for in Solomon's esteem "a good name is better than precious ointment." The best way to deal with slander is to pray about it: God will either remove it or remove the sting from it. Our own attempts at clearing ourselves are usually failures: we are like the boy who wished to remove the blot from his copy, and by his bungling made it ten times worse. When we suffer from a libel it is better to pray about it than go to law over it, or even to demand an apology from the inventor, O ye who are reproached, take your matters before the highest court, and leave them with the Judge of all the earth. God will rebuke your proud accuser; be ye quiet, and let your advocate plead your cause.

"For I have kept thy testimonies." Innocence may justly ask to be cleared from reproach. If there be truth in the charges alleged against us, what can we urge with God? If, however, we are wrongfully accused; our appeal has a locus standi in the court and cannot be refused. If through fear of reproach we forsake the divine testimony we shall deserve the coward's doom; our safety lies in sticking close to the true and to the right. God will keep those who keep his testimonies. A good conscience is the best security for a good name; reproach will not abide with those who abide with Christ, neither will contempt remain upon those who remain faithful to the ways of the Lord. This verse stands as a parallel both in sense and position to verse 6, and it has the catchword of "testimonies," by which it chimes with verse 14.

23. Princes also did sit and speak against me: but thy servant did meditate in thy statutes.

"Princes also did sit and speak against me." David was high game, and the great ones of the earth went a-hawking after him. Princes saw in him a greatness which they envied, and therefore they abused him. On their thrones they might have found something better to consider and speak about, but they turned the seat of judgment into the seat of the scorner. Most men covet a prince's good word, and to be spoken ill of by a great man is a great discouragement to them; but the Psalmist bore his trial with holy calmness. Many of the lordly ones were his enemies, and made it their business to speak ill of him; they held sittings for scandal, sessions for slander, parliaments of falsehood, and yet he survived all their attempts upon him. "But thy servant did meditate in thy statutes." This was brave indeed. He was God's servant, and therefore he attended to his Master's business; he was God's servant, and therefore felt sure that the Lord would defend him. He gave no heed to his princely slanderers; he did not even allow his thoughts to be disturbed by a knowledge of their plotting in conclave. Who were these malignants that they should rob God of his servant's attention, or deprive the Lord's chosen of a moment's devout communion? The rabble of princes were not worth five minutes' thought, if those five minutes had to be taken from holy meditation. It is very beautiful to see the two sittings: the princes sitting to reproach David, and David sitting with his God and his Bible, answering his traducers by never answering them at all. Those who feed upon the word grow strong and peaceful, and are by God's grace hidden from

the strife of tongues.

Note that in the close of the former octave he had said, "I will meditate"; and here he shows how he had redeemed his promise, even under great provocation to forget it. It is a praiseworthy thing when the resolve of our happy hours is duly carried out in our seasons of affliction.

24. Thy testimonies also are my delight and my counsellors.

They were not only themes for meditation, but "also" sources of delight and means of guidance. While his enemies took counsel with each other, the holy man took counsel with the testimonies of God. The fowlers could not drive the bird from its nest with all their noise. It was their delight to slander and his delight to meditate. The words of the Lord serve us for many purposes; in our sorrows they are our delight, and in our difficulties they are our guide; we derive joy from them and discover wisdom in them. If we desire to find comfort in the Scriptures we must submit ourselves to their counsel, and when we follow their counsel it must not be with reluctance, but with delight. This is the safest way of dealing with those who plot for our ruin; let us give more heed to the true testimonies of the Lord than to the false witness of our foes. The best answer to accusing princes is the word of the justifying King. In verse 16 David said, "I will delight in thy statutes," and here he says, "They are my delight": thus resolutions formed in God's strength come to fruit, and spiritual desires ripen into actual attainments. Oh that it might be so with all the readers of these lines!

Exposition of Psalm 119:25-32

Exposition of Verses 25 to 32 25. MY soul cleaveth unto the dust: quicken thou me according to thy word.

26. I have declared my ways, and thou heardest me; teach me thy statutes.

27. Make me to understand the way of thy precepts: so shall I talk of thy wondrous works.

28. My soul melteth for heaviness: strengthen thou me according unto thy word.

29. Remove from me the way of lying: and grant me thy law graciously.

30. I have chosen the way of truth: thy judgments have I laid before me.

31. I have stuck unto thy testimonies: O Lord, put me not to shame.

32. I will run the way of thy commandments, when thou shalt enlarge my heart.

Here, it seems to me, we have the Psalmist in trouble bewailing the bondage to earthly things in which he finds his mind to be held. His soul cleaves to the dust, melts for heaviness, and cries for enlargement from its spiritual prison. In these verses we shall see the influence of the divine word upon a heart which laments its downward tendencies, and is filled with mourning because of its deadening surroundings. The word of the Lord evidently arouses prayer (25-29), confirms choice (30), and inspires renewed resolve (32): it is in all tribulation, whether of body or mind, the surest source of help. This portion has D for its alphabetical letter: it sings of Depression, in the spirit of Devotion, Determination, and Dependence.

25. My soul cleaveth unto the dust: quicken thou me according to thy word.

"My soul cleaveth unto the dust." He means in part that he was full of sorrow; for mourners in the east cast dust on their heads, and sat in ashes, and the Psalmist felt as if these ensigns of woe were glued to him, and his very soul was made to cleave to them because of his powerlessness to rise above his grief. Does he not also mean that he felt ready to die? Did he not feel his life absorbed and fast held by the grave's mould, half choked by the death-dust? It may not be straining the language if we conceive that he also felt and bemoaned his earthly-mindedness and spiritual deadness. There was a tendency in his soul to cling to earth which he greatly bewailed. Whatever was the cause of his complaint, it was no surface evil, but an affair of his inmost spirit; his soul cleaved to the dust; and it was not a casual and accidental falling into the dust, but a continuous and powerful tendency, or cleaving to the earth. But what a mercy that the good man could feel and deplore whatever there was of evil in the cleaving! The serpent's seed can find their meat in the dust, but never shall the seed of the woman be thus degraded. Many are of the earth earthy, and never lament it; only the heaven-born and heaven-soaring spirit pines at the thought of being fastened to this world, and bird-limed by its sorrows or its pleasures.

"Quicken thou me according to thy word." More life is the cure for all our ailments. Only the Lord can give it He can bestow it, bestow it at once, and do it according to his word, without departing from the usual course of his grace, as we see it mapped out in the Scriptures. It is well to know what to pray for—David seeks quickening: one would have thought that he would have asked for comfort or upraising; but he knew that these would come out of increased life, and therefore he sought that blessing which is the root of the rest. When a person is depressed in spirit, weak, and bent towards the ground, the main thing is to increase his stamina and put more life into him; then his spirit revives, and his body becomes erect. In reviving the life, the whole man is renewed. Shaking off the dust is a little thing by itself; but when it follows upon quickening, it is a blessing of the greatest value; just as good spirits, which flow from established health, are among the choicest of our mercies. The phrase, "according to thy word," means—according to thy revealed way of quickening thy saints. The word of God shows us that he who first made us must keep us alive; and it tells us of the Spirit of God who through the ordinances pours fresh life into our souls: we beg the Lord to act towards us in this his own regular method of grace. Perhaps David remembered the word of the Lord in Deut xxxii. 39, where Jehovah claims both to kill and to make alive, and he beseeches the Lord to exercise that life-giving power upon his almost expiring servant. Certainly, the man of God had not so many rich promises to rest upon as we have; but even a single word was enough for him, and he right earnestly urges "according to thy word." It is a grand thing to see a believer in the dust and yet pleading the promise, a man at the grave's mouth crying, "quicken me," and hoping that it shall be done.

Note how this first verse of the 4th octonary tallies with the first of the third (17),—"That I may live": ... "Quicken me." While in a happy state he begs for bountiful dealing, and when in a forlorn condition he prays for quickening. Life is in both cases the object of pursuit: that he may have life, and have it more abundantly. Truly this is wisdom. Fools hunger for meat, and yet lose life; but the wise man knows that the life is more than meat. To pine for riches and neglect the soul is the common sin of unbelievers, and to seek true riches in an increase of life is the prudent course of the believer. Life, eternal life, this is true treasure. Our Lord has come not only that we may have life, but that we may have it more abundantly. Lord, evermore pour thy life-floods into us, that we may be quickened to the fulness of our manhood, and filled with all the fulness of God.

26. I have declared my ways, and thou heardest me: teach me thy statutes.

"I have declared my ways." Open confession is good for the soul. Nothing brings more ease and more life to a man than a frank acknowledgment of the evil which has caused the sorrow and the lethargy. Such a declaration proves that the man knows his own condition, and is no longer blinded by pride. Our confessions are not meant to make God know our sins, but to make us know them. "And thou heardest me." His confession had been accepted; it was not lost labour; God had drawn near to him in it We ought never to go from a duty till we have been accepted in it. Pardon follows upon penitent confession, and David felt that he had obtained it. It is God's way to forgive our sinful way when we from our hearts confess the wrong.

"Teach me thy statutes." Being truly sorry for his fault, and having obtained full forgiveness, he is anxious to avoid offending again, and hence he begs to be taught obedience. He was not willing to sin through ignorance, he wished to know all the mind of God by being taught it by the best of teachers. He pined after holiness. Justified men always long to be sanctified. When God forgives

our sins we are all the more fearful of sinning again. Mercy, which pardons transgression, sets us longing for grace which prevents transgression. We may boldly ask for more when God has given us much; he who has cashed out the past stain will not refuse that which will preserve us from present and future defilement. This cry for teaching is frequent in the Psalm; in verse 12 it followed a sight of God, here it follows from a sight of self. Every experience should lead us thus to plead with God.

27. Make me to understand the way of thy precepts: so shall I talk of thy wondrous works.

"Make me to understand the way of thy precepts." Give me a deep insight into the practical meaning of thy word; let me get a clear idea of the tone and tenor of thy law. Blind obedience has but small beauty; God would have us follow him with our eyes open. To obey the letter of the word is all that the ignorant can hope for: if we wish to keep God's precepts in their spirit we must come to an understanding of them, and that can be gained nowhere but at the Lord's hands. Our understanding needs enlightenment and direction: he who made our understanding must also make us understand. The last sentence was, "teach me thy statutes," and the words, "make me to understand," are an instructive enlargement and exposition of that sentence: we need to be so taught that we understand what we learn. It is to be noted that the Psalmist is not anxious to understand the prophecies, but the precepts, and he is not concerned about the subtleties of the law, but the commonplaces and everyday rules of it, which are described as "the way of thy precepts."

"So shall I talk of thy wondrous works." It is ill talking of what we do not understand. We must be taught of God till we understand, and then we may hope to communicate our knowledge to others with a hope of profiting them. Talk without intelligence is mere talk, and idle talk; but the words of the instructed are as pearls which adorn the ears of them that hear. When our heart has been opened to understand, our lips should be opened to impart knowledge; and we may hope to be taught ourselves when we feel in our hearts a willingness to teach the way of the Lord to those among whom we dwell.

"Thy wondrous works" Remark that the clearest understanding does not cause us to cease from wondering at the ways and works of God. The fact is, that the more we know of God's doings the more we admire them, and the more ready we are to speak upon them. Half the wonder in the world is born of ignorance, but holy wonder is the child of understanding. When a man understands the way of the divine precepts he never talks of his own works, and as the tongue must have some theme to speak upon, he begins to extol the works of the all-perfect Lord.

Some in this place read "meditate" or "muse" instead of "talk"; it is singular that the words should be so near of kin, and yet it is right that they should be, for none but foolish people will talk without thinking. If we read the passage in this sense, we take it to mean that in proportion as David understood the word of God he would meditate upon it more and more. It is usually so; the thoughtless care not to know the inner meaning of the Scriptures, while those who know them best are the very men who strive after a greater familiarity with them, and therefore give themselves up to musing upon them.

Observe the third verse of the last eight (19; and see how the sense is akin to this. In that place he described himself as a stranger in the earth, and here he prays to know his way; there, too, he

prayed that the word might not be hid from himself, and here he promises that he will not hide it from others.

28. My soul melteth for heaviness: strengthen thou me according unto thy word.

"My soul melteth for heaviness." He was dissolving away in tears. The solid strength of his constitution was turning to liquid, as if molten by the furnace-heat of his afflictions. Heaviness of soul is a killing thing, and when it abounds, it threatens to turn life into a long death, in which a man seems to drop away in a perpetual drip of grief. Tears are the distillation of the heart; when a man weeps he wastes away his soul. Some of us know what great heaviness means, for we have been brought under its power again and again, and often have we felt ourselves to be poured out like water, and near to being like water spilt upon the ground, never again to be gathered up. There is one good point in this downcast state, for it is better to be melted with grief than to be hardened by impenitence.

"Strengthen thou me according unto thy word." He had found out an ancient promise that the saints shall be strengthened, and here he pleads it. His hope in his state of depression lies not in himself, but in his God; if he may be strengthened from on high he will yet shake off his heaviness and rise to joy again. Observe how he pleads the promise of the word, and asks for nothing more than to be dealt with after the recorded manner of the Lord of mercy. Had not Hannah sung, "He shall give strength unto his King, and exalt the horn of his anointed"? God strengthens us by infusing grace through his word: the word which creates can certainly sustain. Grace can enable us to bear the constant fret of an abiding sorrow, it can repair the decay caused by the perpetual tear-drip, and give to the believer the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness. Let us always resort to prayer in our desponding times, for it is the surest and shortest way out of the depths. In that prayer let us plead nothing but the word of God; for there is no plea like a promise, no argument like a word from our covenant God.

Note how David records his inner soul-life. In verse 20 he says, "My soul breaketh"; in verse 25, "My soul cleaveth unto the dust"; and here, "My soul melteth." Further on, in verse 81, he cries, "My soul fainteth"; in 109, "My soul is continually in my hand"; in 167, "My soul hath kept thy testimonies"; and lastly, in 175, "Let my soul live." Some people do not even know that they have a soul, and here is David all soul. What a difference there is between the spiritually living and the spiritually dead!

29. Remove from me the way of lying: and grant me thy law graciously.

"Remove from me the way of lying." This is the way of sin, error, idolatry, folly, self-righteousness, formalism, hypocrisy. David would not only be kept from that way, but have it kept from him; he cannot endure to have it near him, he would have it swept away from his sight. He desired to be right and upright, true and in the truth; but he feared that a measure of falsehood would cling to him unless the Lord took it away, and therefore he earnestly cried for its removal. False motives may at times sway us, and we may fall into mistaken notions of our own spiritual condition before God, which erroneous conceits may be kept up by a natural prejudice in our own favour, and so we may be confirmed in a delusion, and abide under error unless grace comes to the rescue. No true heart can rest in a false view of itself; it finds no anchorage, but is tossed to and fro till it gets into the truth and the truth into it. The true-born child of heaven sighs out and cries against a lie,

desiring to have it taken away as much as a man desires to be set at a distance from a venomous serpent or a raging lion.

"And grant me thy law graciously." He is in a gracious state who looks upon the law itself as a gift of grace. David wishes to have the law opened up to his understanding, engraved upon his heart, and carried out in his life; for this he seeks the Lord, and pleads for it as a gracious grant. No doubt he viewed this as the only mode of deliverance from the power of falsehood: if the law be not in our hearts the lie will enter. David would seem to have remembered those times when, according to the eastern fashion, he had practised deceit for his own preservation, and he saw that he had been weak and erring on that point; therefore he was bowed down in spirit and begged to be quickened and delivered from transgressing in that manner any more. Holy men cannot review their sins without tears, nor weep over them without entreating to be saved from further offending.

There is an evident opposition between falsehood and the gracious power of God's law. The only way to expel the lie is to accept the truth. Grace also has a clear affinity to truth: no sooner do we meet with the sound of the word "graciously" than we hear the footfall of truth: "I have chosen the way of truth." Grace and truth are ever linked together, and a belief of the doctrines of grace is a grand preservative from deadly error. In the fifth verse of the preceding octave (21) David cries out against pride, and here against lying—these are much the same thing. Is not pride the greatest of all lies?

30. I have chosen the way of truth: thy judgments have I laid before me.

"I have chosen the way of truth." As he abhorred the way of lying, so he chose the way of truth: a man must choose one or the other, for there cannot be any neutrality in the case. Men do not drop into the right way by chance; they must choose it, and continue to choose it, or they will soon wander from it. Those whom God has chosen in due time choose his way. There is a doctrinal way of truth which we ought to choose, rejecting every dogma of man's devising; there is a ceremonial way of truth which we should follow, detesting all the forms which apostate churches have invented; and then there is a practical way of truth, the way of holiness, to which we must adhere, whatever may be our temptation to forsake it. Let our election be made, and made irrevocably. Let us answer to all seducers, "I have chosen, and what I have chosen I have chosen." O Lord, by thy grace lead us with a hearty freewill to choose to do thy will; thus shall thine eternal choice of us bring forth the end which it designs.

"Thy judgments have I laid before me." What he had chosen he kept in mind, laying it out before his mind's eye. Men do not become holy by a careless wish: there must be study, consideration, deliberation and earnest enquiry, or the way of truth will be missed. The commands of God must be set before us as the mark to aim at, the model to work by, the road to walk in. If we put God's judgments into the background we shall soon find ourselves going back from them.

Here again the sixth stanzas of the third and fourth octaves ring out a similar note. "I have kept thy testimonies" (22), and "Thy judgments have I laid before me." This is a happy confession, and there is no wonder that it is repeated.

31. "I have stuck unto thy testimonies: O Lord, put me not to shame."

"I have stuck unto thy testimonies,"—or, I have cleaved; for the word is the same as in verse 25. Though cleaving to the dust of sorrow and of death, yet he kept fast hold of the divine word. This was his comfort, and his faith stuck to it, his love and his obedience held on to it, his heart and his mind abode in meditation upon it His choice was so heartily and deliberately made that he stuck to it for life, and could not be removed from it by the reproaches of those who despised the way of the Lord. What could he have gained by quitting the sacred testimony? Say rather, what would he not have lost if he had ceased to cleave to the divine word? It is pleasant to look back upon past perseverance and to expect grace to continue equally steadfast in the future. He who has enabled us to stick to him will surely stick to us. In these days, when so many make their boast of "advanced thought," it may sound singular to speak of sticking to God's testimonies; but whether singular or not, let us imitate the man of God. Perseverance in the truth when it is unfashionable is the test of a real believer. The faith of God's elect wears constancy as its crown. Others may gad abroad after the novelties of human opinion; but the true-born child of God glories in saying to his heavenly Father—"I have stuck unto thy testimonies."

"O Lord, put me not to shame." This would happen if God's promises were unfulfilled, and if the heart of God's servant were suffered to fail. This we have no reason to fear, since the Lord is faithful to his word. But it might also happen through the believer's acting in an inconsistent manner, as David had himself once done, when he fell into the way of lying, and pretended to be a madman. If we are not true to our profession we may be left to reap the fruit of our folly, and that will be the bitter thing called "shame." It is evident from this that a believer ought never to be ashamed, but act the part of a brave man who has done nothing to be ashamed of in believing his God, and does not mean to adopt a craven tone in the presence of the Lord's enemies. If we beseech the Lord not to put us to shame, surely we ought not ourselves to be ashamed in the presence of the adversary. The prayer of this verse is found in the parallel verse of the next section (39): "Turn away my reproach which I fear." It is evidently a petition which was often on the Psalmist's heart A brave heart is more wounded by shame than by any weapon which a soldier's hand can wield.

32. I will run the way of thy commandments, when thou shalt enlarge my heart.

"I will run the way of thy commandments." With energy, promptitude, and zeal he would perform the will of God, but he needed more life and liberty from the hand of God. "When thou shalt enlarge my heart." Yes, the heart is the master; the feet soon run when the heart is free and energetic. Let the affections be aroused and eagerly set on divine things, and our actions will be full of force, swiftness and delight God must work in us first, and then we shall will and do according to his good pleasure. He must change the heart, unite the heart, encourage the heart, strengthen the heart, and enlarge the heart, and then the course of the life will be gracious, sincere, happy and earnest; so that from our lowest up to our highest state in grace we must attribute all to the free favour of our God. We must run; for grace is not an overwhelming force which compels unwilling minds to move contrary to their will: our running is the spontaneous leaping forward of a mind which has been set free by the hand of God, and delights to show its freedom by its bounding speed.

What a change from verse 25 to the present, from cleaving to the dust to running in the way! It is the excellence of holy sorrow that it works in us the quickening for which we seek, and then we

show the sincerity of our grief and the reality of our revival by being zealous in the ways of the Lord. For the third time an octave closes with, "I will."

These "I wills" of the Psalms are right worthy of being each one the subject of study and discourse.

Note how the heart has been spoken of up to this point: "whole heart" (2), "uprightness of heart" (7), "hid in mine heart" (11), "enlarge my heart." There are many more allusions further on, and these all go to show what heart-work David's religion was. It is one of the great lacks of our age that heads count for more than hearts, and men are far more ready to learn than to love, though they are by no means eager in either direction.

Exposition of Psalm 119:33-40

Exposition of Psalms 119:33-40 33. TEACH me, O Lord, the way of thy statutes; and I shall keep it unto the end.

34. Give me understanding, and I shall keep thy law; yea, I shall observe it with my whole heart.

35. Make me to go in the path of thy commandments; for therein do I delight.

36. Incline my heart, unto thy testimonies, and not to covetousness.

37. Turn away mine eyes from beholding vanity; and quicken thou me in thy way.

38. Stablish thy word unto thy servant, who is devoted to thy fear.

39. Turn away my reproach which I fear: for thy judgments are good.

40. Behold, I have longed after thy precepts: quicken me in thy righteousness. A sense of dependence and a consciousness of extreme need pervade this section, which is all made up of prayer and plea. The former eight verses trembled with a sense of sin, quivering with a childlike sense of weakness and folly, which caused the man of God to cry out for the help by which alone his soul could be preserved from falling back into sin. That cry for help is here expressed in requests for teaching, upholding, inclining, stablishing and quickening. The section is a honeycomb of prayers. Let us put up similar petitions while we read, and we may be assured that prayers thus taught us by the Lord will be answered by him.

33. "Teach me, O Lord, the way of thy statutes; and I shall keep it unto the end."

"Teach me, O Lord, the way of thy statutes." Childlike, blessed words, from the lips of an old, experienced believer, and he a king, and a man inspired of God. Alas for those who will never be taught! They dote upon their own wisdom; but their folly is apparent to all who rightly judge. The Psalmist desires to have the Lord for his teacher; for he feels that his heart will not learn of any less effectual instructor. A sense of great slowness to learn drives us to seek a great teacher. What condescension it is on our great Jehovah's part that he deigns to teach those who seek him! The lesson which is desired is thoroughly practical; the holy man would not only learn the statutes, but the way of them, the daily use of them, their tenor, spirit, direction, habit, tendency. He would know that path of holiness which is hedged in by divine law, along which the commands of the Lord stand as sign-posts of direction, and milestones of information, guiding and marking our progress. The very desire to learn this way is in itself an assurance that we shall be taught therein; for he who made us long to learn will be sure to gratify the desire.

"And I shall keep it unto the end." Those who are taught of God never forget their lessons. When divine grace sets a man in the true way, he will be true to it. Mere human wit and will have no such enduring influence: there is an end to all perfection of the flesh, but there is no end to heavenly grace except its own end, which is the perfecting of holiness in the fear of the Lord. Perseverance to the end is most certainly to be predicted of those whose beginning is in God, and with God, and

by God; but those who commence without the Lord's teaching soon forget what they learn, and start aside from the way upon which they professed to have entered. No one may boast that he will hold on his way in his own strength, for that must depend upon the continual teaching of the Lord: we shall fall like Peter, if we presume on our own firmness, as he did. If God keeps us we shall keep his way; and it is a great comfort to know that it is the way with God to keep the feet of his saints. Yet we are to watch as if our keeping of the way depended wholly on ourselves: for, according to this verse, our perseverance rests not on any force or compulsion, but on the teaching of the Lord, and assuredly teaching, whoever be the teacher, requires learning on the part of the taught one: no one can teach a man who refuses to learn. Earnestly, then, let us drink in divine instruction, that so we may hold fast our integrity, and to life's latest hour follow on in the path of uprightness! If we receive the living and incorruptible seed of the word of God we must live: apart from this we have no life eternal, but only a name to live. The "end" of which David speaks is the end of life, or the fulness of obedience. He trusted in grace to make him faithful to the utmost, never drawing a line and saying to obedience, "Hitherto shalt thou come, but no further." The end of our keeping the law will come only when we cease to breathe; no good man will think of marking a date and saying, "It is enough, I may now relax my watch, and live after the manner of men." As Christ loves us to the end, so must we serve him to the end. The end of divine teaching is that we may persevere to the end. The portions of eight show a relationship still. Gimel begins with prayer for life, that he may keep the word (17); Daleth cries for more life, according to that word (25); and now He opens with a prayer for teaching, that the man of God may keep the way of God's statutes. If a keen eye is turned upon these verses a closer affinity will be discerned.

34. Give me understanding, and I shall keep thy law; yea, I shall observe it with my whole heart.

"Give me understanding, and I shall keep thy law." This is the same prayer enlarged, or rather it is a supplement which intensifies it. He not only needs teaching, but the power to learn: he requires not only to understand, but to obtain an understanding. How low has sin brought us; for we even lack the faculty to understand spiritual things, and are quite unable to know them till we are endowed with spiritual discernment! Will God in very deed give us understanding? This is a miracle of grace. It will, however, never be wrought upon us till we know our need of it; and we shall not even discover that need till God gives us a measure of understanding to perceive it. We are in a state of complicated ruin, from which nothing but manifold grace can deliver us. Those who feel their folly are by the example of the Psalmist encouraged to pray for understanding: let each man by faith cry, "Give me understanding." Others have had it, why may it not come to me? It was a gift to them; will not the Lord also freely bestow it upon me?

We are not to seek this blessing that we may be famous for wisdom, but that we may be abundant in our love to the law of God. He who has understanding will learn, remember, treasure up, and obey the commandment of the Lord. The gospel gives us grace to keep the law; the free gift leads us to holy service; there is no way of reaching to holiness but by accepting the gift of God. If God gives, we keep; but we never keep the law in order to obtaining grace. The sure result of regeneration, or the bestowal of understanding, is a devout reverence for the law and a resolute keeping of it in the heart. The Spirit of God makes us to know the Lord and to understand somewhat of his love, wisdom, holiness, and majesty; and the result is, that we honour the law and yield our hearts to the obedience of the faith.

Matthew Henry wisely notes that "an enlightened understanding is that which we are indebted to Christ for; for 'the Son of God is come, and hath given us an understanding'" (1 John v. 20). Any writer can give us something to understand, but only the Lord Jesus can give to us understanding itself.

"Yea, I shall observe it with my whole heart." The understanding operates upon the affections; it convinces the heart of the beauty of the law, so that the soul loves it with all its powers; and then it reveals the majesty of the lawgiver, and the whole nature bows before his supreme will. An enlightened judgment heals the divisions of the heart, and bends the united affections to a strict and watchful observance of the one rule of life. He alone obeys God who can say, "My Lord, I would serve thee, and do it with all my heart"; and none can truly say this till they have received as a free grant the inward illumination of the Holy Ghost. To observe God's law with all our heart at all times is a great grace, and few there be that find it; yet it is to be had if we will consent to be taught of the Lord.

Look backward and observe the parallel to this verse in verses 2 and 10, where the whole heart is spoken of in reference to seeking, and then look forward to the like parallel in verse 58 in pleading, for mercy; these are all second verses in their octonaries. The frequent repetition of the phrase whole heart shows the importance of undivided love: the heart is never whole or holy till it is whole and wholly united in the fear of the Lord. The heart is never one with God till it is one within itself, and it is never one with itself till it is at one with God.

35. Make me to go in the path of thy commandments: for therein do I delight.

"To will is present with me; but how to perform that which is good I find not." Thou hast made me to love the way, now make me to move in it. It is a plain path, which others are treading through thy grace; I see it and admire it; cause me to travel in it This is the cry of a child that longs to walk, but is too feeble; of a pilgrim who is exhausted, yet pants to be on the march; of a lame man who pines to be able to run. It is a blessed thing to delight in holiness; and surely he who gave us this delight will work in us the yet higher joy of possessing and practising it Here is our only hope; for we shall not go in the narrow path till we are made to do so by the Maker's own power. O thou who didst once make me, I pray thee make me again: thou hast made me to know; now make me to go! Certainly I shall never be happy till I do, for my sole delight lies in walking according to thy bidding. The Psalmist does not ask the Lord to do for him what he ought to do for himself: he wishes himself to "go" or tread in the path of the command. He asks not to be carried while he lies passive; but to be made "to go." Grace does not treat us as stocks and stones, to be dragged by horses or engines, but as creatures endowed with life, reason, will, and active powers, who are willing and able to go of themselves if once made to do so. God worketh in us, but it is that we may both will and do according to his good pleasure. The holiness we seek after is not a forced compliance with command, but the indulgence of a wholehearted passion for goodness, such as shall conform our life to the will of the Lord. Can the reader say, "therein do I delight"? Is practical godliness the very jewel of your soul, the coveted prize of your mind? If so, the outward path of life, however rough, will be clean, and lead the soul upward to delight ineffable. He who delights in the law should not doubt but what he will be enabled to run in its ways; for where the heart already finds its joy, the feet are sure to follow.

Note that the corresponding verse in the former eight (35) was, "Make me to understand"; and here we have, "Make me to go." Remark the order: first understanding, and then going; for a clear understanding is a great assistance towards practical action.

During the last few octaves the fourth has been the heart verse: see 20, 28, and now 36. Indeed, in all the preceding fourths great heartiness is observable. This also marks the care with which this sacred song was composed.

36. Incline my heart unto thy testimonies, and not to covetousness.

"Incline my heart unto thy testimonies." Does not this prayer appear to be superfluous, since it is evident that the Psalmist's heart was set upon obedience? We are sure that there is never a word to spare in Scripture. After asking for active virtue, it was meet that the man of God should beg that his heart might be in all that he did. What would his goings be if his heart did not go? It may be that David felt a wandering desire, an inordinate leaning of his soul to worldly gain; possibly it even intruded into his most devout meditations, and at once he cried out for more grace. The only way to cure a wrong leaning is to have the soul bent in the opposite direction. Holiness of heart is the cure for covetousness. What a blessing it is that we may ask the Lord even for an inclination! Our wills are free; and yet, without violating their liberty, grace can incline us in the right direction. This can be done by enlightening the understanding as to the excellence of obedience, by strengthening our habits of virtue, by giving us an experience of the sweetness of piety, and by many other ways. If any one duty is irksome to us, it behoves us to offer this prayer with special reference thereto: we are to love all the Lord's testimonies, and if we fail in any one point, we must pay double attention to it. The leaning of the heart is the way in which the life will lean: hence the force of the petition, "Incline my heart." Happy shall we be when we feel habitually inclined to all that is good! This is not the way in which a carnal heart ever leans; all its inclinations are in opposition to the divine testimonies.

"And not to covetousness" This is the inclination of nature, and grace must put a negative upon it. This vice is as injurious as it is common; it is as mean as it is miserable. It is idolatry, and so it dethrones God; it is selfishness, and so it is cruel to all in its power; it is sordid greed, and so it would sell the Lord himself for pieces of silver. It is a degrading, grovelling, hardening, deadening sin, which withers everything around it that is lovely and Christlike. He who is covetous is of the race of Judas, and will in all probability turn out to be himself a son of perdition. The crime of covetousness is common, but very few will confess it; for when a man heaps up gold in his heart, the dust of it blows into his eyes, and he cannot see his own fault. Our hearts must have some object of desire, and the only way to keep out worldly gain is to put in its place the testimonies of the Lord. If we are inclined or bent one way, we shall be turned from the other: the negative virtue is most surely attained by making sure of the positive grace which inevitably produces it.

37. Turn away mine eyes from beholding vanity; and quicken thou me in thy way.

"Turn away mine eyes from beholding vanity." He had prayed about his heart, and one would have thought that the eyes would so surely have been influenced by the heart that there was no need to make them the objects of a special petition; but our author is resolved to make assurance doubly sure. If the eyes do not see, perhaps the heart may not desire: at any rate, one door of temptation is closed when we do not even look at the painted bauble. Sin first entered man's mind by the eye,

and it is still a favourite gate for the incoming of Satan's allurements; hence the need of a double watch upon that portal. The prayer is not so much that the eyes may be shut as "turned away"; for we need to have them open, but directed to right objects. Perhaps we are now gazing upon folly, we need to have our eyes turned away; and if we are beholding heavenly things, we shall be wise to beg that our eyes may be kept away from vanity. Why should we look on vanity?—it melts away as a vapour. Why not look upon things eternal? Sin is vanity, unjust gain is vanity, self-conceit is vanity, and, indeed, all that is not of God comes under the same head. From all this we must turn away. It is a proof of the sense of weakness felt by the Psalmist and of his entire dependence upon God, that he even asks to have his eyes turned for him; he meant not to make himself passive, but he intended to set forth his own utter helplessness apart from the grace of God. For fear he should forget himself and gaze with a lingering longing upon forbidden objects, he entreats the Lord speedily to make him turn away his eyes, hurrying him off from so dangerous a parley with iniquity. If we are kept from looking on vanity we shall be preserved from loving iniquity.

"And quicken thou me in thy way" Give me so much life that dead vanity may have no power over me. Enable me to travel so swiftly in the road to heaven that I may not stop long enough within sight of vanity to be fascinated thereby. The prayer indicates our greatest need,—more life in our obedience. It shows the preserving power of increased life to keep us from the evils which are around us, and it also tells us where that increased life must come from, namely, from the Lord alone. Vitality is the cure of vanity. When the heart is full of grace the eyes will be cleansed from impurity. On the other hand, if we would be full of life as to the things of God we must keep ourselves apart from sin and folly, or the eyes will soon captivate the mind, and, like Samson, who could slay his thousands, we may ourselves be overcome through the lusts which enter by the eye. This verse is parallel to verses 21 and 29 in the previous eights: "rebuke," "remove," "turn away"; or "proud," "lying," "vanity."

38. Stablish thy word unto thy servant, who is devoted to thy fear.

"Stablish thy word unto thy servant." Make me sure of thy sure word: make it sure to me, and make me sure of it. If we possess the spirit of service, and yet are troubled with sceptical thoughts, we cannot do better than pray to be established in the truth. Times will arise when every doctrine and promise seems to be shaken, and our mind gets no rest: then we must appeal to God for establishment in the faith; for he would have all his servants to be well instructed and confirmed in his word. But we must mind that we are the Lord's servants, for else we shall not long be sound in his truth. Practical holiness is a great help towards doctrinal certainty: if we are God's servants he will confirm his word in our experience. "If any man will do his will, he shall know of the doctrine"; and so know it as to be fully assured of it. Atheism in the heart is a horrible plague to a God-fearing man, it brings more torment with it than can well be described; and nothing but a visitation of grace can settle the soul after it has been violently assailed thereby. Vanity or falsehood is bad for the eyes, but it is even worse when it defiles the understanding and casts a doubt upon the word of the living God.

"Who is devoted to thy fear" or simply—"to thy fear." That is, make good thy word to godly fear wherever it exists; strengthen the whole body of reverent men. Stablish thy word, not only to me, but to all the godly ones under the sun. Or, again, it may mean—"Stablish thy word to thy fear," namely, that men may be led to fear thee; since a sure faith in the divine promise is the fountain

and foundation of godly fear. Men will never worship a God in whom they do not believe. More faith will lead to more godly fear. We cannot look for the fulfilment of promises in our experience unless we live under the influence of the fear of the Lord: establishment in grace is the result of holy watchfulness and prayerful energy. We shall never be rooted and grounded in our belief unless we daily practise what we profess to believe. Full assurance is the reward of obedience. Answers to prayer are given to those whose hearts answer to the Lord's command. If we are devoted to God's fear we shall be delivered from all other fear. He has no fear as to the truth of the word who is filled with fear of the Author of the word. Scepticism is both the parent and the child of impiety; but strong faith both begets piety and is begotten of it We commend this whole verse to any devout man whose tendency is to scepticism: it will be an admirable prayer for use in seasons of unusually strong misgivings.

There is here an argumentative prayer. As good Bishop Cowper says,— "He who has received of the Lord grace to fear him, may be bold to seek any necessary good thing from him; because the fear of God hath annexed to it the promise of all other blessings."

39. Turn away my reproach which I fear: for thy judgments axe good.

"Turn away my reproach which I fear" He feared just reproach, trembling lest he should cause the enemy to blaspheme through any glaring inconsistency. We ought to fear this, and watch that we may avoid it Persecution in the form of calumny may also be prayed against, for it is a sore trial, perhaps the sorest of trials to men of sensitive minds. Many would sooner bear burning at the stake than the trial of cruel mockings. David was quick tempered, and he probably had all the greater dread of slander because it raised his anger, and he could hardly tell what he might not do under great provocation. If God turns away our eyes from falsehood, we may also expect that he will turn away falsehood from injuring our good name. We shall be kept from lies if we keep from lies. The judgments of the wicked are bad, and we may therefore appeal from them to the judgment of God. If, however, we have so acted as to come under the just censures of men, what cause we have to fear the juster judgments of the Lord!

"For thy judgments are good." Therefore he is anxious that none may speak evil of the ways of God through hearing an ill report about himself. We mourn when we are slandered; because the shame is cast rather upon our religion than ourselves. If men would be content to attribute evil to us, and go no further, we might bear it, for we are evil; but our sorrow is, that they cast a slur upon the word and character of God, who is so good, that there is none good in comparison with him. When men rail at God's government of the world, it is our duty and privilege to stand up for him, and openly to declare before him, "Thy judgments are good"; and we should do the same when they assail the Bible, the gospel, the law, or the name of our Lord Jesus Christ But we must take heed that they can bring no truthful accusation against us, or our testimony will be so much wasted breath. This prayer against reproach is a parallel to verse 31, and in general to many other of the seventh verses in the octaves, which usually imply opposition from without and a sacred satisfaction within. Observe the things which are good: "thy judgments are good" (39); "thou art good, and doest good" (68); "good for me that I have been afflicted" (71); teach me good judgment" (66).

40. Behold, I have longed after thy precepts: quicken me in thy righteousness.

"Behold, I have longed after thy precepts." He can at least claim sincerity. He is deeply bowed down by a sense of his weakness and need of grace; but he does desire to be in all things conformed to the divine will. Where our longings are, there are we in the sight of God. If we have not attained perfection, it is something to have hungered after it. He who has given us to desire, will also grant us to obtain. The precepts are grievous to the ungodly, and therefore when we are so changed as to long for them we have clear evidence of conversion, and we may safely conclude that he who has begun the good work will carry it on. Any man may long for the promises; but to long after the precepts is the mark of a renewed heart.

"Quicken me in thy righteousness." The Psalmist had life enough to long for more life, in order that he might more perfectly know and observe the precepts of the Lord. Give me more life wherewith to follow thy righteous law; or give me more life because thou hast promised to hear prayer, and it is according to thy righteousness to keep thy word. How often does David plead for quickening! But never once too often. We need quickening every hour of the day, for we are so sadly apt to become slow and languid in the ways of God. It is the Holy Spirit who can pour new life into us; let us not cease crying to him. The creation of life is a divine work, and so is the increase of it. Never let us forget to pray for quickening in each and every duty. Even the precepts seem a dead letter unless we feel life in our obedience to them. Nothing is worse in religion than spiritual death. The living God should be served with living worship. The last verses of the octaves have generally exhibited an onward look of resolve, hope, and prayer. Here past fruits of grace are made the plea for further blessing. "Onward in the heavenly life!" is the cry of this verse. Oh for grace to press forward, and make daily advances towards heaven.

Keble thus versifies these eight verses:—

33 Lord, shower thy light along my way, That I may keep thy laws entire, 34 Thy precepts teach me to obey, And watch with all my heart's desire 35 By thine appointed rule and line, Guide me, for there I love to be;

36 My heart to thy decrees incline, And not to gold's base witchery.

37 From sight of ill mine eyes withdraw, Give life and gladness in thy road, 38 And on thy servant bind thy law, As best may teach thy fear, O God.

39 Spare me the shame I deeply fear, Most merciful in judgment spare;

40 Thou seest I hold thy counsels dear, Give life, thy righteousness to share

Exposition of Psalm 119:41-48

Exposition of Psalms 119:41-48 41. LET thy mercies come also unto me, O Lord, even thy salvation, according to thy word.

42. So shall I have wherewith to answer him that reproacheth me: for I trust in thy word.

43. And take not the word of truth utterly out of my mouth; for I have hoped in thy judgments.

44. So shall I keep thy law continually for ever and ever.

45. And I will walk at liberty: for I seek thy precepts.

46. I will speak of thy testimonies also before kings, and will not be ashamed.

47. And I will delight myself in thy commandments, which I have loved 48. My hands also will I lift up unto thy commandments, which I have loved; and I will meditate in thy statutes. In these verses holy fear is apparent and prominent. The man of God trembles lest in anyway or degree the Lord should remove his favour from him. The eight verses are one continued pleading for the abiding of grace in his soul, and it is supported by such holy arguments as would only suggest themselves to a spirit burning with love to God.

41. "Let thy mercies come also unto me, O Lord, even thy salvation, according to thy word."

"Let thy mercies come also unto me, O Lord." He desired mercy as well as teaching, for he was guilty as well as ignorant. He needed much mercy and varied mercy, hence the request is in the plural. He needed mercies from God rather than from man, and so he asks for "thy mercies." The way of grace appeared to be blocked, and therefore he begs that the mercies may have their way cleared by God, and may "come" to him. He who said, "Let there be light," can also say, "Let there be mercy." It may be that under a sense of unworthiness the writer feared lest mercy should be given to others, and not to himself; he therefore cries, "Let them come unto me"; "Bless me, even me also, O my Father." The words are tantamount to our well-known verse—

"Lord, I hear of showers of blessing Thou art scattering, full and free;

Showers, the thirsty land refreshing;

Let some droppings fall on me,

Even me"

Lord, thine enemies come to me to reproach me, let thy mercies come to me to defend me; trials and troubles abound, and labours and sufferings not a few approach me; Lord, let thy mercies in great number enter by the same gate, and at the same hour; for art thou not "the God of my mercy"?

"Even thy salvation." This is the sum and crown of all mercies—deliverance from all evil, both now and for ever. Here is the first mention of salvation in the psalm, and it is joined with mercy: "By grace are ye saved." Salvation is styled "thy salvation," thus ascribing it wholly to the Lord: "He that is our God is the God of salvation." What a mass of mercies are heaped together in the one salvation of our Lord Jesus! It includes the mercy which spares us till our conversion, and leads to that conversion. We have calling mercy, regenerating mercy, converting mercy, justifying mercy, pardoning mercy. Nor can we exclude from complete salvation any of those many mercies which conduct the believer safely to glory. Salvation is an aggregate of mercies, incalculable in number, priceless in value, incessant in application, eternal in endurance. To the God of our mercies be glory, world without end.

"According to thy word." The way of salvation is described in the word; salvation itself is promised in the word; and its inward manifestation is wrought by the word; so that in all respects the salvation which is in Christ Jesus is in accordance with God's word. David loved the Scriptures, but he longed experimentally to know the salvation contained in them: he was not satisfied to read the word, he longed to experience its inner sense. He valued the field of Scripture for the sake of the treasure which he had discovered in it. He was not contented with having chapter and verse, he wanted mercies and salvation.

Note that in the first verse of the section which bears the letter He (33) the Psalmist prayed to keep God's word, and here in Vau he begs the Lord to keep his word. In the first case he longed to come to the God of mercies, and here he would have the Lord's mercies come to him: there he sought grace to persevere in faith, and here he seeks the end of his faith, even the salvation of his soul.

42. So shall I have wherewith to answer him that reproacheth me: for I trust in thy word.

"So shall I have wherewith to answer him that reproacheth me." This is an unanswerable answer. When God, by granting us salvation, gives to our prayers an answer of peace, we are ready at once to answer the objections of the infidel, the quibbles of the sceptical, and the sneers of the contemptuous. It is most desirable that revilers should be answered, and hence we may expect the Lord to save his people, in order that a weapon may be put into their hands with which to rout his adversaries. When those who reproach us are also reproaching God, we may ask him to help us to silence them by sure proofs of his mercy and faithfulness.

"For I trust in thy word." His faith was seen by his being trustful while under trial, and he pleads it as a reason why he should be helped to beat back reproaches by a happy experience. Faith is our argument when we seek mercies and salvation; faith in the Lord who has spoken to us in his word. "I trust in thy word" is a declaration more worth the making than any other; for he who can truly make it has received power to become a child of God, and so to be the heir of unnumbered mercies. God hath more respect to a man's trust than to all else that is in him; for the Lord hath chosen faith to be the hand into which he will place his mercies and his salvation. If any reproach us for trusting in God, we reply to them with arguments the most conclusive when we show that God has kept his promises, heard our prayers, and supplied our needs. Even the most sceptical are forced to bow before the logic of facts. In this second verse of this octave the Psalmist makes a confession of faith, and a declaration of his belief and experience. Note that he does the same in the corresponding verses of the sections which follow. See 50, "Thy word hath quickened me"; 58,

"I intreated thy favour"; 66, "I have believed thy commandments"; 74, "I have hoped in thy word." A wise preacher might find in these a valuable series of experimental discourses.

43. And take not the word of truth utterly out of my mouth; for I have hoped in thy judgments.

"And take not the word of truth utterly out of my mouth." Do not prevent my pleading for thee by leaving me without deliverance; for how could I continue to proclaim thy word if I found it fail me? such would seem to be the run of the meaning. The word of truth cannot be a joy to our mouths unless we have an experience of it in our lives, and it may be wise for us to be silent if we cannot support our testimonies by the verdict of our consciousness. This prayer may also refer to other modes by which we may be disabled from speaking in the name of the Lord: as, for instance, by our falling into open sin, by our becoming depressed and despairing, by our labouring under sickness or mental aberration, by our finding no door of utterance, or meeting with no willing audience. He who has once preached the gospel from his heart is filled with horror at the idea of being put out of the ministry; he will crave to be allowed a little share in the holy testimony, and will reckon his dumb Sabbaths to be days of banishment and punishment.

"For I have hoped in thy judgments." He had expected God to appear and vindicate his cause, that so he might speak with confidence concerning his faithfulness. God is the author of our hopes, and we may most fittingly entreat him to fulfil them. The judgments of his providence are the outcome of his word; what he says in the Scriptures he actually performs in his government; we may therefore look for him to show himself strong on the behalf of his own threatenings and promises, and we shall not look in vain.

God's ministers are sometimes silenced through the sins of their people, and it becomes them to plead against such a judgment; better far that they should suffer sickness or poverty than that the candle of the gospel should be put out among them, and that thus they should be left to perish without remedy. The Lord save us, who are his ministers, from being made the instruments of inflicting such a penalty. Let us exhibit a cheerful hopefulness in God, that we may plead it in prayer with him when he threatens to close our lips. In the close of this verse there is a declaration of what the Psalmist had done in reference to the word of the Lord, and in this the thirds of the octaves are often alike. See 35, "therein do I delight"; 43, "I have hoped in thy judgments"; 51, "yet have I not declined from thy law"; 59, "I turned my feet unto thy testimonies"; and verses 67, 83, 99, etc. These verses would furnish an admirable series of meditations.

44. So shall I keep thy law continually for ever and ever.

Nothing more effectually binds a man to the way of the Lord than an experience of the truth of his word, embodied in the form of mercies and deliverances. Not only does the Lord's faithfulness open our mouths against his adversaries, but it also knits our hearts to his fear, and makes our union with him more and more intense. Great mercies lead us to feel an inexpressible gratitude which, failing to utter itself in time, promises to engross eternity with praises. To a heart on flame with thankfulness, the "always, unto eternity and perpetuity" of the text will not seem to be redundant; yea, the hyperbole of Addison in his famous verse will only appear to be solid sense:—

"Through all eternity to thee A joyful song I'll raise; But oh! eternity's too short To utter all thy praise."

God's grace alone can enable us to keep his commandments without break and without end; eternal love must grant us eternal life, and out of this eternal life will come everlasting obedience. There is no other way to ensure our perseverance in holiness but by the word of truth abiding in us, as David prayed it might abide with him. The verse begins with "So," as did verse 42. When God grants his salvation, we are so favoured that we silence our worst enemy and glorify our best friend. Mercy answereth all things. If God doth but give us salvation we can conquer hell and commune with heaven, answering reproaches, and keeping the law, and that to the end, world without end.

We may not overlook another sense which suggests itself here. David prayed that the word of truth might not be taken out of his mouth, and so would he keep God's law: that is to say, by public testimony as well as by personal life he would fulfil the divine will, and confirm the bonds which bound him to his Lord for ever. Undoubtedly the grace which enables us to bear witness with the mouth is a great help to ourselves as well as to others: we feel that the vows of the Lord are upon us, and that we cannot run back. Our ministry is useful to ourselves first, or it would not, in the next place, be useful to others. We must so preach and teach the word of God, that we thereby fulfil our life-work, and fulfil the law of love, constantly and consistently. It is a horrible thing when a man's preaching only increases his sin because he preaches otherwise than Scripture teaches.

45. And I will walk at liberty: for I seek thy precepts.

Saints find no bondage in sanctity. The Spirit of holiness is a free spirit; he sets men at liberty and enables them to resist every effort to bring them under subjection. The way of holiness is not a track for slaves, but the King's highway for freemen, who are joyfully journeying from the Egypt of bondage to the Canaan of rest God's mercies and his salvation, by teaching us to love the precepts of the word, set us at a happy rest; and the more we seek after the perfection of our obedience, the more shall we enjoy complete emancipation from every form of spiritual slavery. David at one time of his life was in great bondage through having followed a crooked policy. He deceived Achish so persistently that he was driven to acts of ferocity to conceal it, and he must have felt very unhappy in his unnatural position as an ally of Philistines, and captain of the bodyguard of their king. He must have feared lest through his falling into the crooked ways of falsehood the truth would no longer be on his tongue, and he therefore prayed God in some way to work his deliverance, and set him at liberty from such slavery. By terrible things in righteousness did the Lord answer him at Ziklag: the snare was broken, and he escaped. The verse is united to that which goes before; for it begins with the word "And," which acts as a hook to attach it to the preceding verses. It mentions another of the benefits expected from the coming of mercies from God. The man of God had mentioned the silencing of his enemies (42), power to proceed in testimony (43), and perseverance in holiness; now he dwells upon liberty, which next to life is dearest to all brave men. He says, "I shall walk," indicating his daily progress through life; "at liberty," as one who is out of prison, unimpeded by adversaries, unencumbered by burdens, unshackled, allowed a wide range, and roaming without fear. Such liberty would be dangerous if a man were seeking himself or his own lusts; but when the one object sought after is the will of God, there can be no need to restrain the searcher. We need not circumscribe the man who can say, "I seek thy precepts." Observe, in the preceding verse he said he would keep the law; but here he speaks of seeking it. Does he not mean that he will obey what he knows, and endeavour to know more? Is not this the way to the highest form of liberty—to be always labouring to know the mind of

God, and to be conformed to it? Those who keep the law are sure to seek it, and bestir themselves to keep it more and more.

46. I will speak of thy testimonies also before kings, and will not be ashamed. This is part of his liberty; he is free from fear of the greatest, proudest, and most tyrannical of men. David was called to stand before kings when he was an exile; and afterwards, when he was himself a monarch, he knew the tendency of men to sacrifice their religion to pomp and statecraft; but it was his resolve to do nothing of the kind. He would sanctify politics, and make cabinets know that the Lord alone is governor among the nations. As a king he would speak to kings concerning the King of kings. He says, "I will speak": prudence might have suggested that his life and conduct would be enough, and that it would be better not to touch upon religion in the presence of royal personages who worshipped other gods, and claimed to be right in so doing. He had already most fittingly preceded this resolve by the declaration, "I will walk"; but he does not make his personal conduct an excuse for sinful silence, for he adds, "I will speak." David claimed religious liberty, and took care to use it, for he spoke out what he believed, even when he was in the highest company. In what he said he took care to keep to God's own word, for he says, "I will speak of thy testimonies." No theme is like this, and there is no way of handling that theme like keeping close to the book, and using its thought and language. The great hindrance to our speaking upon holy topics in all companies is shame, but the Psalmist will "not be ashamed"; there is nothing to be ashamed of, and there is no excuse for being ashamed, and yet many are as quiet as the dead for fear some creature like themselves should be offended. When God gives grace, cowardice soon vanishes. He who speaks for God in God's power, will not be ashamed when beginning to speak, nor while speaking, nor after speaking; for his theme is one which is fit for kings, needful to kings, and beneficial to kings. If kings object, we may well be ashamed of them, but never of our Master who sent us or of his message, or of his design in sending it 47. And I will delight myself in thy commandments, which I have loved.

Next to liberty and courage comes delight. When we have done our duty, we find a great reward in it. If David had not spoken for his Master before kings, he would have been afraid to think of the law which he had neglected; but after speaking up for his Lord he felt a sweet serenity of heart when musing upon the word. Obey the command, and you will love it; carry the yoke, and it will be easy, and rest will come by it. After speaking of the law, the Psalmist was not wearied of his theme, but he retired to meditate upon it: he discoursed, and then he delighted; he preached, and then repaired to his study to renew his strength by feeding yet again upon the precious truth. Whether he delighted others or not when he was speaking, he never failed to delight himself when he was musing on the word of the Lord. He declares that he loved the Lord's commands, and by his avowal he unveils the reason for his delight in them: where our love is, there is our delight. David did not delight in the courts of kings, for there he found places of temptation to shame, but in the Scriptures he found himself at home; his heart was in them, and they yielded him supreme pleasure. No wonder that he spoke of keeping the law, which he loved: Jesus says, "If a man love me he will keep my words." No wonder that he spoke of walking at liberty and speaking boldly, for true love is ever free and fearless. Love is the fulfilling of the law; where love to the law of God reigns in the heart, the life must be full of blessedness. Lord, let thy mercies come to us, that we may love thy word and way, and find our whole delight therein. The verse is in the future, and hence it sets forth, not only what David had done, but what he would do; he would in time to come

delight in his Lord's commands. He knew that they would neither alter, nor fail to yield him joy. He knew also that grace would keep him in the same condition of heart towards the precepts of the Lord, so that he should throughout his whole life take a supreme delight in holiness. His heart was so fixed in love to God's will that he was sure that grace would always hold him under its delightful influence.

All the psalm is fragrant with love to the word, but here for the first time love is expressly spoken of. It is here coupled with delight, and in verse 165 with "great peace." All the verses in which love declares itself in so many words are worthy of note. See Psalms 119:47; Psalms 119:97; Psalms 119:113; Psalms 119:119; Psalms 119:127; Psalms 119:140; Psalms 119:159; Psalms 119:163; Psalms 119:165; Psalms 119:167.

48. My hands also will I lift up unto thy commandments, which I have loved; and I will meditate in thy statutes.

"My hands also will I lift up unto thy commandments, which I have loved." He will stretch out towards perfection as far as he can, hoping to reach it one day. When his hands hang down he will cheer himself out of languor by the prospect of glorifying God by obedience; and he will give solemn sign of his hearty assent and consent to all that his God commands. The phrase "lift up my hands" is very full of meaning, and doubtless the sweet singer meant all that we can see in it, and a great deal more. Again he declares his love; for a true heart loves to express itself; it is a kind of fire which must send forth its flames. It was natural that he should reach out towards a law which he delighted in, even as a child holds out its hand to receive a gift which it longs for. When such a lovely object as holiness is set before us, we are bound to rise towards it with our whole nature, and till that is fully accomplished we should at least lift up our hands in prayer towards it Where holy hands and holy hearts go, the whole man will one day follow.

"And I will meditate in thy statutes." He can never have enough of meditation. Loving subjects wish to be familiar with their sovereign's statutes, lest they should offend through ignorance. Prayer with lifted hands, and meditation with upward-glancing eyes will in happy union work out the best inward results. The prayer of verse 41 is already fulfilled in the man who is thus struggling upward and studying deeply. The whole of this verse is in the future, and may be viewed not only as a determination of David's mind, but as a result which he knew would follow from the Lord's sending him his mercies and his salvation. When mercy comes down, our hands will be lifted up; when we enjoy the consciousness that God thinks upon us with special love, we are sure to think of him.

Exposition of Psalm 119:49-56

Exposition of Psalms 119:49-56 49. REMEMBER the word unto thy servant, upon which thou hast caused me to hope.

50. This is my comfort in my affliction: for thy word hath quickened me.

51. The proud have had me greatly in derision: yet have I not declined from thy law.

52. I remembered thy judgments of old, O Lord; and have comforted myself.

53. Horror hath taken hold upon me because of the wicked that forsake thy law.

54. Thy statutes have been my songs in the house of my pilgrimage.

55. I have remembered thy name, O Lord, in the night, and have kept thy law.

56. This I had, because I kept thy precepts. This octrain deals with the comfort of the word. It begins by seeking the main consolation, namely, the Lord's fulfilment of his promise, and then it shows how the word sustains us under affliction, and makes us so impervious to ridicule that we are moved by the harsh conduct of the wicked rather to horror of their sin than to any submission to their temptations. We are then shown how the Scripture furnishes songs for pilgrims, and memories for night-watchers; and the portion concludes by the general statement that the whole of this happiness and comfort arises out of keeping the statutes of the Lord.

49. Remember the word unto thy servant, upon which thou hast caused me to hope.

"Remember the word unto thy servant." He asks for no new promise, but to have the old word fulfilled He is grateful that he has received so good a word he embraces it with all his heart, and now entreats the Lord to deal with him according to it. He does not say, "remember my service to thee," but "thy word to me." The words of masters to servants are not always such that servants wish their lords to remember them; for they usually observe the faults and failings of the work done, so far as it does not tally with the word of command. But we who serve the best of masters are not anxious to have one of his words fall to the ground, since the Lord will so kindly remember his word of command as to give us grace wherewith we may obey, and he will couple with it a remembrance of his word of promise, so that our hearts shall be comforted. If God's word to us as his servants is so precious, what shall we say of his word to us as his sons? The Psalmist does not fear a failure in the Lord's memory, but he makes use of the promise as a plea, and this is the form in which he speaks, after the manner of men when they plead with one another. When the Lord remembers the sins of his servant; and brings them before his conscience, the penitent cries, Lord, remember thy word of pardon, and therefore remember my sins and iniquities no more. There is a world of meaning in that word "remember" as it is addressed to God; it is used in Scripture in the tenderest sense, and suits the sorrowing and the depressed. The Psalmist cried, "Lord, remember David, and all his afflictions": Job also prayed that the Lord would appoint him a set time, and remember him. In the present instance the prayer is as personal as the "Remember

me" of the thief, for its essence lies in the words—"unto thy servant." It would be all in vain for us if the promise were remembered to all others if it did not come true to ourselves; but there is no fear of failure; for the Lord has never forgotten a single promise to a single believer.

"Upon which thou hast caused me to hope." The argument is that God, having given grace to hope in the promise, will never disappoint that hope. He cannot have caused us to hope without reason. If we hope upon his word we have a sure basis to build upon: our gracious Lord will never mock us by exciting false hopes. Hope deferred maketh the heart sick; hence the petition for immediate remembrance of the cheering word. Moreover, it is the hope of a servant, and it is not possible that a great and good master would disappoint his dependent. If such a master's word were not kept, it could only be through an oversight; hence the anxious cry, "Remember." Our great Master will not forget his own servants, nor disappoint the expectation which he himself has raised: because we are the Lord's, and endeavour to remember his word by obeying it, we may be sure that he will think upon his own servants, and remember his own promise by making it good. This verse is the prayer of love fearing to be forgotten, of humility conscious of insignificance and anxious not to be overlooked, of penitence trembling lest the evil of its sin should overshadow the promise, of eager desire longing for the blessing, and of holy confidence which feels that all that is wanted is comprehended in the word. Let but the Lord remember his promise, and the promised act is as good as done.

50. This is my comfort in my affliction: for thy word hath quickened me.

He means—Thy word is my comfort, or the fact that thy word has brought quickening to me is my comfort Or he means that the hope which God had given him was his comfort, for God had quickened him thereby. Whatever may be the exact sense, it is clear that the Psalmist had affliction—affliction peculiar to himself, which he calls "my affliction"; that he had comfort in it—comfort specially his own, for he styles it "my comfort"; and that he knew what the comfort was, and where it came from, for he exclaims—"This is my comfort." The worldling clutches his money-bag, and says, "This is my comfort"; the spendthrift points to his gaiety, and shouts, "This is my comfort"; the drunkard lifts his glass, and sings, "This is my comfort"; but the man whose hope comes from God feels the life-giving power of the word of the Lord, and he testifies, "This is my comfort." Paul said, "I know whom I have believed."

Comfort is desirable at all times; but comfort in affliction is like a lamp in a dark place. Some are unable to find comfort in tribulation; but it is not so with believers, for their Saviour has said to them, "I will not leave you comfortless." Some have comfort and no affliction, others have affliction and no comfort; but the saints have comfort in their affliction. The word frequently comforts us by increasing the force of our inner life: "This is my comfort; thy word hath quickened me." To quicken the heart is to cheer the whole man. Often the near way to consolation is by sanctification and invigoration. If we cannot clear away the fog, it may be better to rise to a higher level, and so to get above it Troubles which weigh us down while we are half dead become mere trifles when we are full of life. Thus have we often been raised in spirit by quickening grace; and the same thing will happen again, for the Comforter is still with us, the Consolation of Israel ever liveth, and the very God of peace is evermore our Father. On looking back upon our past life there is one ground of comfort as to our state—the word of God has made us alive, and kept us so. We were dead, but we are dead no longer. From this we gladly infer that if the Lord had meant to destroy he would not

have quickened us. If we were only hypocrites worthy of derision, as the proud ones say, he would not have revived us by his grace. An experience of quickening by the word of God is a fountain of good cheer.

See how the experience of this verse is turned into a prayer in verse 107: "Quicken me, O Lord, according unto thy word." Experience teaches us how to pray, and furnishes arguments in prayer.

51. The proud have had me greatly in derision: yet have I not declined from thy law.

"The proud have had me greatly in derision." Proud men never love gracious men, and as they fear them, they veil their fear under a pretended contempt. In this case their hatred revealed itself in ridicule, and that ridicule was loud and long. When they wanted sport they made sport of David because he was God's servant. Men must have strange eyes to be able to see a farce in faith, and a comedy in holiness; yet it is sadly the case that men who are short of wit can generally provoke a broad grin by jesting at a saint. Conceited sinners make footballs of godly men. They call it roaring fun to caricature a faithful member of "The Holy Club": his methods of careful living are the material for their jokes about "the Methodist"; and his hatred of sin sets their tongues a-wagging at long-faced Puritanism, and strait-laced hypocrisy. If David was greatly derided, we may not expect to escape the scorn of the ungodly. There are hosts of proud men still upon the face of the earth, and if they find a believer in affliction they will be mean enough and cruel enough to make jests at his expense. It is the nature of the son of the bondwoman to mock the child of the promise.

"Yet have I not declined from thy law." Thus the deriders missed their aim: they laughed, but they did not win. The godly man, so far from turning aside from the right way, did not even slacken his pace, or in any sense fall off from his holy habits. Many would have declined, many have declined, but David did not do so. It is paying too much honour to fools to yield half a point to them. Their unhallowed mirth will not harm us if we pay no attention to it, even as the moon suffers nothing from the dogs that howl at her. God's law is our highway of peace and safety, and those who would laugh us out of it wish us no good. From verse 61 we note that David was not overcome by the spoiling of his goods any more than by these cruel mockings. See also verse 157, where the multitude of persecutors and enemies were baffled in their attempts to make him decline from God's ways.

52. "I remembered thy judgments of old, O Lord; and have comforted myself."

He had asked the Lord to remember, and here he remembers God and his judgments. When we see no present display of the divine power, it is wise to fall back upon the records of former ages, since they are just as available as if the transactions were of yesterday, seeing the Lord is always the same. Our true comfort must be found in what our God works on behalf of truth and right, and as the histories of the olden times are full of divine interpositions, it is well to be thoroughly acquainted with them. Moreover, if we are advanced in years we have the providences of our early days to review, and these should by no means be forgotten or left out of our thoughts. The argument is good and solid: he who has shown himself strong on behalf of his believing people is the immutable God, and therefore we may expect deliverance at his hands. The grinning of the proud will not trouble us when we remember how the Lord dealt with their predecessors in bygone periods: he destroyed them at the deluge, he confounded them at Babel, he drowned them at the Red Sea, he drove them out of Canaan: he has in all ages bared his arm against the haughty, and

broken them as potters' vessels. While in our own hearts we humbly drink of the mercy of God in quietude, we are not without comfort in seasons of turmoil and derision; for then we resort to God's justice, and remember how he scoffs at the scoffers: "He that sitteth in the heavens doth laugh, the Lord doth have them in derision." When he was greatly derided the Psalmist did not sit down in despair, but rallied his spirits. He knew that comfort is needful for strength in service, and for the endurance of persecution, and therefore he comforted himself. In doing this he resorted not so much to the sweet as to the stern side of the Lord's dealings: he dwelt upon his judgments. If we can find sweetness in the divine justice, how much more shall we perceive it in divine love and grace! How thoroughly must that man be at peace with God who can find comfort, not only in his promises, but in his judgments! Even the terrible things of God are cheering to believers. They know that nothing is more to the advantage of all God's creatures than to be ruled by a strong hand which will deal out justice. The righteous man has no fear of the ruler's sword, which is only a terror to evildoers. When the godly man is unjustly treated he finds comfort in the fact that there is a Judge of all the earth who will avenge his own elect, and redress the ills of these disordered times.

53. Horror hath taken hold upon me because of the wicked that forsake thy law.

He was horrified at their action, at the pride which led them to it, and at the punishment which would be sure to fall upon them for it. When he thought upon the ancient judgments of God he was filled with terror at the fate of the godless; as well he might be. Their laughter had not distressed him, but he was distressed by a foresight of their overthrow. Truths which were amusement to them caused amazement to him. He saw them utterly turning away from the law of God, and leaving it as a path forsaken and overgrown from want of traffic, and this forsaking of the law filled him with the most painful emotions: he was astonished at their wickedness, stunned by their presumption, alarmed by the expectation of their sudden overthrow, amazed by the terror of their certain doom.

See verses 106 and 158, and note the tenderness which combined with all this. Those who are the firmest believers in the eternal punishment of the wicked are the most grieved at their doom. It is no proof of tenderness to shut one's eyes to the awful doom of the ungodly. Compassion is far better shown in trying to save sinners than in attempting to make things pleasant all round. Oh that we were all more distressed as we think of the portion of the ungodly in hell! The usual plan is to shut your eyes to it, or try to doubt it; but the faithful servant of God can say, "So did not I, because of the fear of God."

54. Thy statutes have been my songs in the house of my pilgrimage.

Like others of God's servants, David knew that he was not at home in this world, but a pilgrim through it, seeking a better country. He did not, however, sigh over this fact, but he sang about it. He tells us nothing about his pilgrim sighs, but speaks of his pilgrim songs. Even the palace in which he dwelt was but "the house of his pilgrimage." the inn at which he rested, the station at which he halted for a little while. Men are wont to sing when they come to their inn, and so did this godly sojourner; he sang the songs of Zion, the statutes of the great King. The commands of God were as well known to him as the ballads of his country, and they were pleasant to his taste, and musical to his ear. Happy is the heart which finds its joy in the commands of God, and makes obedience its recreation! When religion is set to music it goes well. When we sing in the ways of

the Lord it shows that our hearts are in them. Ours are pilgrim psalms, or Songs of Degrees; but they are such as we may sing throughout eternity; for the statutes of the Lord are the psalmody of the highest heaven.

Saints find horror in sin, and harmony in holiness. The wicked shun the law, and the righteous sing of it. In past days we have sung the Lord's statutes, and in this fact we may find comfort in present affliction. Since our songs are so very different from those of the proud, we may expect to join a very different choir at the last from that in which they sing, and to make music in a place far removed from their abode.

Note how in the sixth verses of their respective octaves we often find resolves to bless God, or records of testimony. In verse 46 it is, "I will speak," and in 62, "I will give thanks," while here he speaks of songs.

55. "I have remembered thy name, O Lord, in the night, and have kept thy law."

"I have remembered thy name, O Lord, in the night." When others slept I woke to think of thee, thy person, thy actions, thy covenant, thy name, under which last term he comprehends the divine character as far as it is revealed. He was so earnest after the living God that he woke up at dead of night to think upon him. These were David's "Night-Thoughts." If they were not "Sunny Memories" they were memories of the Sun of Righteousness. It is well when our memory furnishes us with consolation, so that we can say with the Psalmist—Having early been taught to know thee, I had only to remember the lessons of thy grace, and my heart was comforted. This verse shows not only that the man of God had remembered, but that he still remembered the Lord his God. We are to hallow the name of God, and we cannot do so if it slips from our memory.

"And have kept thy law." He found sanctification through meditation; by the thoughts of the night he ruled the actions of the day. As the actions of the day often create the dreams of the night, so do the thoughts of the night produce the deeds of the day. If we do not keep the name of God in our memory we shall not keep the law of God in our conduct. Forgetfulness of mind leads up to forgetfulness of life. When we hear the night-songs of revellers we have in them sure evidence that they do not keep God's law; but the quiet musings of gracious men are proof positive that the name of the Lord is dear to them. We may judge of nations by their songs, and so we may of men; and in the case of the righteous, their singing and their thinking are both indications of their love to God: whether they lift up their voices, or sit in silence, they are still the Lord's. Blessed are the men whose "night-thoughts" are memories of the eternal light; they shall be remembered of their Lord when the night of death comes on. Reader, are your thoughts in the dark full of light, because full of God? Is his name the natural subject of your evening reflections? Then it will give a tone to your morning and noonday hours. Or do you give your whole mind to the fleeting cares and pleasures of this world? If so, it is little wonder that you do not live as you ought to do. No man is holy by chance. If we have no memory for the name of Jehovah we are not likely to remember his commandments: if we do not think of him secretly we shall not obey him openly.

56. This I had, because I kept thy precepts.

He had this comfort, this remembrance of God, this power to sing, this courage to face the enemy, this hope in the promise, because he had earnestly observed the commands of God, and striven to walk in them. We are not rewarded for our works, but there is a reward in them. Many a comfort

is obtainable only by careful living: we can surely say of such consolations, "This I had, because I kept thy precepts." How can we defy ridicule if we are living inconsistently? How can we comfortably remember the name of the Lord if we live carelessly?

It may be that David means that he had been enabled to keep the law because he had attended to the separate precepts: he had taken the commands in detail, and so had reached to holiness of life. He who is not careful of the parts of the law cannot keep it as a whole. Or he may mean that by keeping certain of the precepts he had gained spiritual strength to keep others: for God gives more grace to those who have some measure of it, and those who improve their talents shall find themselves improving. Probably it is best to leave the passage open just as our version does; so that we may say of a thousand priceless blessings, "These came to us in the way of obedience." All our possessions are the gifts of grace, and yet it is unquestionably true that certain of them come in the shape of reward. Even when good things come to us in this way the reward is not of debt, but of grace. God first works in us good works, and then rewards us for them. This is a complex condescension, a chequer-work of goodness. In this verse we have an apt conclusion to this section of the psalm, since it contains a strong argument for the prayer with which the section commenced. If we have been helped to remember our Lord's commands we may be sure that he will remember our necessities. The sweet singer had evidence of having kept God's precepts, and therefore he could the more properly beg the Lord to keep his promises. All through the passage we may find pleas, especially in the two remembers. "I have remembered thy judgments," and "I have remembered thy name"; "Remember thy word unto thy servant."

Exposition of Psalm 119:57-64

Exposition of Psalms 119:57-64 57. THOU art my portion, O Lord; I have said that I would keep thy words.

58. I intreated thy favour with my whole heart: be merciful unto me according to thy word.

59. I thought on my ways, and turned my feet unto thy testimonies.

60. I made haste, and delayed not to keep thy commandments.

61. The bands of the wicked have robbed me: but I have not forgotten thy law.

62. At midnight I will rise to give thanks unto thee because of thy righteous judgments.

63. I am a companion of all them that fear thee, and of them that keep thy precepts.

64. The earth, O Lord, is full of thy mercy: teach me thy statutes. In this section the Psalmist seems to take firm hold upon God himself; appropriating him (Psalms 119:57), crying out for him (Psalms 119:58), returning to him (Psalms 119:59), solacing himself in him (Psalms 119:61-62), associating with his people (Psalms 119:63), and sighing for his personal instruction (Psalms 119:64). Note how the first verse of this octave is linked to the last of the former one, of which indeed it is an expansion. "This I had because I kept thy precepts. Thou art my portion, O Lord; I have said that I would keep thy words." Being many, these verses are still but one bread.

57. "Thou art my portion, O Lord: I have said that I would keep thy words."

"Thou art my portion, O Lord." A broken expression. The translators have mended it by insertions, but perhaps it had been better to have left it alone, and then it would have appeared as an exclamation—"My portion, O Lord!" The poet's lost in wonder while he sees that the great and glorious God is all his own! Well might he be so, for there is no possession like Jehovah himself. The form of the sentence expresses joyous recognition and appropriation—"My portion, O Jehovah!" David had often seen the prey divided, and heard the victor shouting over it; here he rejoices as one who seizes his share of the spoil; he chooses the Lord to be his part of the treasure. Like the Levites, he took God to be his portion, and left other matters to those who coveted them. This is a large and lasting heritage, for it includes all, and more than all, and it outlasts all; and yet no man chooses it for himself until God has chosen and renewed him. Who that is truly wise could hesitate for a moment when the infinitely blessed God is set before him to be the object of his choice? David leaped at the opportunity, and grasped the priceless boon. Our author here dares exhibit the title-deeds of his portion before the eye of the Lord himself, for he addresses his joyful utterance directly to God, whom he boldly calls his own. With much else to choose from, for he was a king, and a man of great resources, he deliberately turns from all the treasures of the world, and declares that the Lord, even Jehovah, is his portion.

"I have said that I would keep thy words." We cannot always look back with comfort upon what we have said, but in this instance David had spoken wisely and well. He had declared his choice; he

preferred the word of God to the wealth of worldlings. It was his firm resolve to keep—that is, treasure up and observe—the words of his God; and as he had aforesaid solemnly expressed it in the presence of the Lord himself, so here he confesses the binding obligation of his former vow. Jesus said, "If a man love me, he will keep my words," and this is a case which he might have quoted as an illustration; for the Psalmist's love to God as his portion led to his keeping the words of God. David took God to be his Prince as well as his Portion. He was confident as to his interest in God, and therefore he was resolute in his obedience to him. Full assurance is a powerful source of holiness. The very words of God are to be stored up; for whether they relate to doctrine, promise, or precept, they are most precious. When the heart is determined to keep these words, and has registered its purpose in the court of heaven, it is prepared for all the temptations and trials that may befall it; for, with God as its heritage, it is always in good case.

58. Untreated thy favour with my whole heart: be merciful unto me according to thy word.

"I intreated thy favour with my whole heart." A fully assured possession of God does not set aside prayer, but rather urges us to it; he who knows God to be his God will seek his face, longing for his presence. Seeking God's presence is the idea conveyed by the marginal reading, "thy face," and this is true to the Hebrew. The presence of God is the highest form of his favour, and therefore it is the most urgent desire of gracious souls: the light of his countenance gives us an antepast of heaven. Oh that we always enjoyed it! The good man entreated God's smile as one who begged for his life, and the entire strength of his desire went with the entreaty. Such eager pleadings are sure of success; that which comes from our heart will certainly go to God's heart. The whole of God's favours are ready for those who seek them with their whole hearts.

"Be merciful unto me according to thy word." He has entreated favour, and the form in which he most needs it is that of mercy; for he is more a sinner than anything else. He asks nothing beyond the promise, he only begs for such mercy as the word reveals. And what more could he want or wish for? God has revealed such an infinity of mercy in his word, that it would be impossible to conceive of more. See how the Psalmist dwells upon favour and mercy, he never dreams of merit. He does not demand, but entreat; for he feels his own unworthiness. Note how he remains a suppliant, though he knows that he has all things in his God. God is his portion, and yet he begs for a look at his face. The idea of any other position before God than that of an undeserving though favoured one never entered his head. Here we have his "Be merciful unto me" rising with as much intensity of humble pleading as if he still remained among the most trembling of penitents. The confidence of faith makes us bold in prayer, but it never teaches us to live without prayer, or justifies us in being other than humble beggars at mercy's gate.

59. I thought on my ways, and turned my feet unto thy testimonies.

While studying the word he was led to study his own life, and this caused a mighty revolution. He came to the word, and then he came to himself, and this made him arise and go to his Father. Consideration is the commencement of conversion: first we think, and then we turn. When the mind repents of ill ways, the feet are soon led into good ways; but there will be no repenting until there is deep, earnest thought. Many men are averse to thought of any kind, and as to thought upon their ways, they cannot endure it, for their ways will not bear thinking of. David's ways had not been all that he could have wished them to be, and so his thoughts were sobered o'er with the pale cast of regret; but he did not end with idle lamentations, he set about a practical amendment;

he turned and returned, he sought the testimonies of the Lord, and hastened to enjoy once more the conscious favour of his heavenly Friend. Action without thought is folly, and thought without action is sloth: to think carefully and then to act promptly is a happy combination. He had entreated for renewed fellowship, and now he proved the genuineness of his desire by renewed obedience. If we are in the dark, and mourn an absent God, our wisest method will be not so much to think upon our sorrows as upon our ways: though we cannot turn the course of providence, we can turn the way of our walking, and this will soon mend matters. If we can get our feet right as to holy walking, we shall soon get our hearts right as to happy living. God will turn to his saints when they turn to him; yea, he has already favoured them with the light of his face when they begin to think and turn.

60. I made haste, and delayed not to keep thy commandments.

He made all speed to get back into the royal road from which he had wandered, and to run in that road upon the King's errands. Speed in repentance and speed in obedience are two excellent things. We are too often in haste to sin. Oh that we may be in a greater hurry to obey! Delay in repentance is increase of sin. To be slow to keep the commands is to break them. There is much evil in a lagging pace when God's command is to be followed. A holy alacrity in service is much to be cultivated. It is wrought in us by the Spirit of God, and the preceding verses describe the method of it: we are made to perceive and mourn our errors, we are led to return to the right path, and then we are eager to make up for lost time by dashing forward to fulfil the precept.

Whatever may be the slips and wanderings of an honest heart, there remains enough of true life in it to produce ardent piety when once it is quickened by the visitations of God. The Psalmist entreated for mercy, and when he received it he became eager and vehement in the Lord's ways. He had always loved them, and hence when he was enriched with grace he displayed great vivacity and delight in them. He made double speed; for positively he "made haste," and negatively he refused to yield to any motive which suggested procrastination—he "delayed not." Thus he made rapid advances and accomplished much service, fulfilling thereby the vow which is recorded in the 57th verse: "I said that I would keep thy words." The commands which he was so eager to obey were not ordinances of man, but precepts of the Most High. Many are zealous to obey custom and society, and yet they are slack in serving God. It is a crying shame that men should be served post-haste, and that God's work should have the go-by, or be performed with dreamy negligence.

61. The bands of the wicked have robbed me: but I have not forgotten thy law.

"The bands of the wicked have robbed me." Aforetime they derided him, and now they have defrauded him. Ungodly men grow worse, and become more and more daring, so that they go from ridicule to robbery. Much of this bold opposition arose from their being banded together: men will dare to do in company what they durst not have thought of alone. When firebrands are laid together, there is no telling what a flame they will create. It seems that whole bands of men assailed this one child of God; they are cowardly enough for anything: though they could not kill him, they robbed him; the dogs of Satan will worry saints if they cannot devour them. David's enemies did their utmost: first the serpents hissed, and then they stung. Since words availed not, the wicked fell to blows. How much the ungodly have plundered the saints in all ages, and how often have the righteous borne gladly the spoiling of their goods!

"But I have not forgotten thy law." This was well. Neither his sense of injustice, nor his sorrow at his losses, nor his attempts at defence, diverted him from the ways of God. He would not do wrong to prevent the suffering of wrong, nor do ill to avenge ill. He carried the law in his heart, and therefore no disturbance of mind could take him off from following it. He might have forgotten himself if he had forgotten the law: as it was, he was ready to forgive and forget the injuries done him, for his heart was taken up with the word of God. The bands of the wicked had not robbed him of his choicest treasure, since they had left him his holiness and his happiness.

Some read this passage, "The bands of the wicked environ me." They hemmed him in, they cut him off from succour, they shut up every avenue of escape; but the man of God had his protector with him; a clear conscience relied upon the promise, and a brave resolve stuck to the precept. He could not be either bribed or bullied into sin. The cordon of the ungodly could not keep God from him, nor him from God: this was because God was his portion, and none could deprive him of it, either by force or fraud. That is true grace which can endure the test: some are barely gracious among the circle of their friends, but this man was holy amid a ring of foes.

62. "At midnight I will rise to give thanks unto thee because of thy righteous judgments." He was not afraid of the robbers; he rose, not to watch his house, but to praise his God. Midnight is the hour for burglars, and there were bands of them around David, but they did not occupy his thoughts; these were all up and away with the Lord his God. He thought not of thieves, but of thanks; not of what they would steal, but of what he would give to his God. A thankful heart is such a blessing that it drives out fear and makes room for praise. Thanksgiving turns night into day, and consecrates all hours to the worship of God. Every hour is canonical to a saint. The Psalmist observed posture; he did not lie in bed and praise. There is not much in the position of the body, but there is something, and that something is to be observed whenever it is helpful to devotion and expressive of our diligence or humility. Many kneel without praying, some pray without kneeling; but the best is to kneel and pray: so here, it would have been no virtue to rise without giving thanks, and it would have been no sin to give thanks without rising; but to rise and give thanks is a happy combination. As for the season, it was quiet, lonely, and such as proved his zeal. At midnight he would be unobserved and undisturbed; it was his own time which he saved from his sleep, and so he would be free from the charge of sacrificing public duties to private devotions. Midnight ends one day and begins another, it was therefore meet to give the solemn moments to communion with the Lord. At the turn of the night he turned to his God. He had thanks to give for mercies which God had given: he had on his mind the truth of verse fifty-seven, "Thou art my portion," and if anything can make a man sing in the middle of the night, that is it. The righteous doings of the great Judge gladdened the heart of this godly man. His judgments are the terrible side of God, but they have no terror to the righteous; they admire them, and adore the Lord for them: they rise at night to bless God that he will avenge his own elect. Some hate the very notion of divine justice, and in this they are wide as the poles asunder from this man of God, who was filled with joyful gratitude at the memory of the sentences of the Judge of all the earth. Doubtless in the expression, "thy righteous judgments," David refers also to the written judgments of God upon various points of moral conduct; indeed, all the divine precepts may be viewed in that light; they are all of them the legal decisions of the Supreme Arbitrator of right and wrong. David was charmed with these judgments. Like Paul, he could say, "I delight in the law of God after the inward man." He could not find time enough by day to study the words of divine wisdom, or to bless God for

them, and so he gave up his sleep that he might tell out his gratitude for such a law and such a Lawgiver. This verse is an advance upon the sense of verse fifty-two, and contains in addition the essence of fifty-five. Our author never repeats himself: though he runs up and down the same scale, his music has an infinite variety. The permutations and combinations which may be formed in connection with a few vital truths are innumerable.

63. I am a companion of all them that fear thee, and of them that keep thy precepts.

"I am a companion of all them that fear thee." The last verse said, "I will," and this says, "I am." We can hardly hope to be right in the future unless we are right now. The holy man spent his nights with God and his days with God's people. Those who fear God love those who fear him, and they make small choice as to the rank of their companions so long as they are truly God-fearing men. David was a king, and yet he consorted with "all" who feared the Lord, whether they were obscure or famous, poor or rich. He was a fellow-commoner of the College of All-saints.

He did not select a few specially eminent saints and leave ordinary believers alone. No, he was glad of the society of those who had only the beginning of wisdom in the shape of "the fear of the Lord": he was pleased to sit with them on the lower forms of the school of faith. He looked for inward godly fear, but he also expected to see outward piety, in those whom he admitted to his society; hence he adds, "and of them that keep thy precepts." If they would keep the Lord's commands, the Lord's servant would keep their company. David was known to be on the godly side, he was ever of the Puritanic party: the men of Belial hated him for this, and no doubt despised him for keeping such unfashionable company as that of humble men and women who were strait-laced and religious; but the man of God is by no means ashamed of his associates; so far from this, he even glories to avow his union with them, let his enemies make what they can of it. He found both pleasure and profit in saintly society; he grew better by consorting with the good, and derived honour from keeping right honourable company. What says the reader? Does he relish holy society? Is he at home among gracious people? If so, he may derive comfort from the fact Birds of a feather flock together. A man is known by his company. Those who have no fear of God before their eyes seldom desire the society of saints; it is too slow, too dull for them. Be this our comfort, that when we are let go by death we shall go to our own company, and those who loved the saints on earth shall be numbered with them in heaven. There is a measure of parallelism between this seventh of its octave and the seventh of Teth (71) and of Jod (79); but, as a rule, the similarities which were so manifest in earlier verses are now becoming dim. As the sense deepens, the artificial form of expression is less regarded.

64. "The earth, O Lord, is full of thy mercy: teach me thy statutes."

"The earth, O Lord, is full of thy mercy." David had been exiled, but he had never been driven beyond the range of mercy, for he found the world to be everywhere filled with it. He had wandered in deserts and hidden in caves, and there he had seen and felt the lovingkindness of the Lord. He had learned that far beyond the bounds of the land of promise and the race of Israel the love of Jehovah extended, and in this verse he expressed that large-hearted idea of God which is so seldom seen in the modern Jew. How sweet it is to us to know that not only is there mercy all over the world, but there is such an abundance of it that the earth is "full" of it! It is little wonder that the Psalmist, since he knew the Lord to be his portion, hoped to obtain a measure of his mercy for himself. He desired to know more of one so good; and as the Lord has so freely revealed himself

in nature, he felt encouraged to pray, "teach me thy statutes" It was to him the beau-ideal of mercy to be taught of God, and taught in God's own law. He could not think of a greater mercy than this. Surely, he who fills the universe with his grace will grant such a request as this to his own child. Let us breathe the desire to the All-merciful Jehovah, and we may be assured of its fulfilment. The first verse of this eight is fragrant with full assurance and strong resolve, and this last verse overflows with a sense of the divine fulness, and of the Psalmist's personal dependence. This is an illustration of the fact that full assurance neither damps prayer nor hinders humility. It would be no error if we said that it creates lowliness and suggests supplication. "Thou art my portion, O Lord," is well followed by "teach me"; for the heir of a great estate should be thoroughly educated, that his behaviour may comport with his fortune. What manner of disciples ought we to be whose inheritance is the Lord of hosts! Those who have God for their Portion long to have him for their Teacher. Moreover, those who have resolved to obey are the most eager to be taught. "I have said that I would keep thy words" is beautifully succeeded by "teach me thy statutes." Those who wish to keep a law are anxious to know all its clauses and provisions, lest they should offend through inadvertence. He who does not care to be instructed of the Lord has never honestly resolved to be holy.

Exposition of Psalm 119:65-72

Exposition of Psalms 119:65-72 65. THOU hast dealt well with thy servant, O Lord, according unto thy word.

66. Teach me good judgment and knowledge: for I have believed thy commandments.

67. Before I was afflicted I went astray: but now have I kept thy word.

68. Thou art good and doest good; teach me thy statutes.

69. The proud have forged a lie against me: but I will keep thy precepts with my whole heart.

70. Their heart is as fat as grease; but I delight in thy law.

71. It is good for me that I have been afflicted; that I might learn thy statutes.

72. The law of thy mouth is better unto me than thousands of gold and silver. In this ninth section the verses in the Hebrew all begin with the letter Teth. In our own version they all commence with the letter T, except Psalms 119:67 and Psalms 119:71, and these can easily be made to do so by reading, "Till I was afflicted," and, "Tis good for me." These verses are the tributes of experience, testifying to the goodness of God, the graciousness of his dealings, and the preciousness of his word. Especially the Psalmist proclaims the excellent uses of adversity and the goodness of God in afflicting him. The sixty-fifth verse is the text of the entire octave.

65. "Thou hast dealt well with thy servant, O Lord, according unto thy word." This is the summary of his life, and assuredly it is the sum of ours. The Psalmist tells the Lord the verdict of his heart; he cannot be silent, he must speak his gratitude in the presence of Jehovah, his God. From the universal goodness of God in nature, in Psalms 119:64, it is an easy and pleasant step to a confession of the Lord's uniform goodness to ourselves personally. It is something that God has dealt at all with such insignificant and undeserving beings as we are; and it is far more that he "has dealt well with us, and so well, so wondrously well. He hath done all things well: the rule has no exception. In providence and in grace, in giving prosperity and in sending adversity, in everything Jehovah hath dealt well with us. It is dealing well on our part to tell the Lord that we feel that he hath dealt well with us; for praise of this kind is specially fitting and comely. This kindness of the Lord is, however, no chance matter: he promised to do so, and he has done it according to his word. It is very precious to see the word of the Lord fulfilled in our happy experience; it endears the Scripture to us, and makes us love the Lord of the Scripture. The book of providence tallies with the book of promise: what we read in the page of inspiration we meet with again in the leaves of our life-story. We may not have thought that it would be so; but our unbelief is repented of now that we see the mercy of the Lord to us, and his faithfulness to his word; henceforth we are bound to display a firmer faith both in God and in his promise. He has spoken well, and he has dealt well. He is the best of Masters; for it is to very unworthy and incapable servants that he has acted thus graciously: does not this cause us to delight in his service more and more? We cannot say that we have dealt well with our Master; for when we have done all, we are unprofitable servants; but as

for our Lord, he has given us light work, large maintenance, loving encouragement, and liberal wages. It is a wonder that he has not long ago discharged us, or at least reduced our allowances, or handled us roughly; yet we have had no hard dealings, all has been ordered with as much consideration as if we had rendered perfect obedience. We have had bread enough and to spare, our livery has been duly supplied, and his service has ennobled us and made us happy as kings. Complaints we have none. We lose ourselves in adoring thanksgiving, and find ourselves again in careful thanks-living.

66. "Teach me good judgment and knowledge: for I have believed thy commandments."

"Teach me good judgment and knowledge." Again he begs for teaching, as in Psalms 119:64, and again he uses God's mercy as an argument. Since God had dealt well with him, he is encouraged to pray for judgment to appreciate the Lord's goodness. The gift of good judgment is a form of goodness which the godly man most needs and most desires, and it is one which the Lord is most ready to bestow. David felt that he had frequently failed in judgment in the matter of the Lord's dealings with him: from want of knowledge he had misjudged the chastening hand of the heavenly Father, and therefore he now asks to be better instructed, since he perceives the injustice which he had done to the Lord by his hasty conclusions. He means to say—Lord, thou didst deal well with me when I thought thee hard and stern; be pleased to give me more wit, that I may not a second time think so ill of my Lord. A sight of our errors and a sense of our ignorance should make us teachable. We are not able to judge, for our knowledge is sadly inaccurate and imperfect; if the Lord teaches us knowledge, we shall attain to good judgment, but not otherwise. The Holy Ghost alone can fill us with light, and set our understanding upon a proper balance: let us ardently long for his teachings, since it is most desirable that we should be no longer mere children in knowledge and understanding.

"For I have believed thy commandments." His heart was right, and therefore he hoped his head would be made right. He had faith, and therefore he hoped to receive wisdom. His mind had been settled in the conviction that the precepts of the word were from the Lord, and were therefore just, wise, kind, and profitable. He believed in holiness, and as that belief is no mean work of grace upon the soul, he looked for yet further operations of divine grace. He who believes the commands is the man to know and understand the doctrines and the promises. If in looking back upon our mistakes and ignorances, we can yet see that we heartily love the precepts of the divine will, we have good reason to hope that we are Christ's disciples, and that he will teach us and make us men of good judgment and sound knowledge. A man who has learned discernment by experience, and has thus become a man of sound judgment, is a valuable member of a church, and the means of much edification to others. Let all who would be greatly useful offer the prayer of this verse: "Teach me good judgment and knowledge."

67. Before I was afflicted I went astray: but now have I kept thy word.

"Before I was afflicted I went astray." Partly, perhaps, through the absence of trial. Often our trials act as a thorn-hedge to keep us in the good pasture; but our prosperity is a gap through which we go astray. If any of us remember a time in which we had no trouble, we also probably recollect that then grace was low, and temptation was strong. It may be that some believer cries, "Oh that it were with me as in those summer days before I was afflicted!" Such a sigh is most unwise, and arises from a carnal love of ease: the spiritual man who prizes growth in grace will bless God that

those dangerous days are over, and that if the weather be more stormy it is also more healthy. It is well when the mind is open and candid, as in this instance: perhaps David would never have known and confessed his own strayings if he had not smarted under the rod. Let us join in his humble acknowledgments, for doubtless we have imitated him in his strayings. Why is it that a little ease works in us so much disease? Can we never rest without rusting? Never be filled without waxing fat? Never rise as to one world without going down as to another? What weak creatures we are to be unable to bear a little pleasure! What base hearts are those which turn the abundance of God's goodness into an occasion for sin!

"But now have I kept thy word." Grace is in that heart which profits by its chastening. It is of no use to plough barren soil when there is no spiritual life, affliction works no spiritual benefit; but where the heart is sound, trouble awakens conscience, wandering is confessed, the soul becomes again obedient to the command, and continues to be so. Whipping will not turn a rebel into a child; but to the true child a touch of the rod is a sure corrective. In the Psalmist's case the medicine of affliction worked a change—"but"; an immediate change—"now"; a lasting change—"have I"; an inward change—"have I kept"; a change Godward—"thy word." Before his trouble he wandered, but after it he kept within the hedge of the word, and found good pasture for his soul: the trial tethered him to his proper place; it kept him, and then he kept God's word. Sweet are the uses of adversity, and this is one of them: it puts a bridle upon transgression, and furnishes a spur for holiness.

68. Thou art good, and doest good; teach me thy statutes.

"Thou art good, and doest good." Even in affliction God is good, and does good. This is the confession of experience. God is essential goodness in himself, and in every attribute of his nature he is good in the fullest sense of the term; indeed, he has a monopoly of goodness, for there is none good but one, that is God. His acts are according to his nature: from a pure source flow pure streams. God is not latent and inactive goodness; he displays himself by his doings, he is actively beneficent, he does good. How much good he does no tongue can tell! How good he is no heart can conceive! It is well to worship the Lord as the poet here does by describing him. Facts about God are the best praise of God. All the glory we can give to God is to reflect his own glory upon himself. We can say no more good of God than God is and does. We believe in his goodness, and so honour him by our faith; we admire that goodness, and so glorify him by our love; we declare that goodness, and so magnify him by our testimony.

"Teach me thy statutes." The same prayer as before, backed with the same argument. He prays, "Lord be good, and do good to me, that I may both be good and do good through thy teaching." The man of God was a learner, and delighted to learn: he ascribed this to the goodness of the Lord, and hoped that for the same reason he would be allowed to remain in the school and learn on till he could perfectly practise every lesson. His chosen class-book was the royal statutes; he wanted no other. He knew the sad result of breaking those statutes, and by a painful experience he had been led back to the way of righteousness; and therefore he begged, as the greatest possible instance of the divine goodness, that he might be taught a perfect knowledge of the law, and a complete conformity to it. He who mourns that he has not kept the word longs to be taught it; and he who rejoices that by grace he has been taught to keep it, is not less anxious for the like instruction to be continued to him. In Psalms 119:12, which is the fourth verse of Beth, we have much the same sense as in this fourth verse of Teth.

69. "The proud have forged a lie against me: but I will keep thy precepts with my whole heart.

"The proud have forged a lie against me." They first derided him (Psalms 119:51), then defrauded him (Psalms 119:61), and now they have defamed him. To injure his character they resorted to falsehood, for they could find nothing against him if they spoke the truth. They forged a lie as a blacksmith beats out a weapon of iron, or they counterfeited the truth as men forge false coin. The original may suggest a common expression—"They have patched up a lie against me." They were not too proud to lie. Pride is a lie; and when a proud man utters lies "he speaketh of his own." Proud men are usually the bitterest opponents of the righteous: they are envious of their good fame, and are eager to ruin it. Slander is a cheap and handy weapon if the object is the destruction of a gracious reputation; and when many proud ones conspire to concoct, exaggerate, and spread abroad a malicious falsehood, they generally succeed in wounding their victim, and it is no fault of theirs if they do not kill him outright. Oh the venom which lies under the tongue of a liar! Many a happy life has been embittered by it, and many a good name has been poisoned as with the deadliest drug. It is painful to the last degree to hear unscrupulous men hammering away at the devil's anvil forging a new calumny; the only help against it is the sweet promise, "No weapon that is formed against thee shall prosper and every tongue that riseth against thee in judgment thou shalt condemn."

"But I will keep thy precepts with my whole heart." My one anxiety shall be to mind my own business, and stick to the commandments of the Lord. If the mud which is thrown at us does not blind our eyes or bruise our integrity, it will do us little harm. If we keep the precepts, the precepts will keep us in the day of contumely and slander. David renews his resolve—"I will keep"; he takes a new look at the commands, and sees them to be really the Lord's—"thy precepts"; and he arouses his entire nature to the work—"with my whole heart." When slanders drive us to more resolute and careful obedience they work our lasting good: falsehood hurled against us may be made to promote our fidelity to the truth, and the malice of men may increase our love to God. If we try to answer lies by our words we may be beaten in the battle; but a holy life is an unanswerable refutation of all calumnies. Spite is balked if we persevere in holiness despite all opposition.

70. Their heart is as fat as grease; but I delight in thy law.

"Their heart is as fat as grease." They delight in fatness, but I delight in thee. Their hearts, through sensual indulgence, have grown insensible, coarse, and grovelling; but thou hast saved me from such a fate through thy chastening hand. Proud men grow fat through carnal luxuries, and this makes them prouder still. They riot in their prosperity, and fill their hearts therewith till they become insensible, effeminate, and self-indulgent. A greasy heart is something horrible; it is a fatness which makes a man fatuous, a fatty degeneration of the heart which leads to feebleness and death. The fat in such men is killing the life in them. Dryden wrote,

"O souls! In whom no heavenly fire is found, Fat minds and ever grovelling on the ground."

In this condition men have no heart except for luxury, their very being seems to swim and stew in the fat of cookery and banqueting. Living on the fat of the land, their nature is subdued to that which they have fed upon; the muscle of their nature has gone to softness and grease.

"But I delight in thy law." How much better is it to joy in the law of the Lord than to joy in sensual indulgences! This makes the heart healthy, and keeps the mind lowly. No one who loves holiness has the slightest cause to envy the prosperity of the worldling. Delight in the law elevates and ennobles, while carnal pleasure clogs the intellect and degrades the affections. There is and always ought to be a vivid contrast between the believer and the sensualist, and that contrast is as much seen in the affections of the heart as in the actions of the life: their heart is as fat as grease, and our heart is delighted with the law of the Lord. Our delights are a better test of our character than anything else: as a man's heart is, so is the man. David oiled the wheels of life with his delight in God's law, and not with the fat of sensuality. He had his relishes and dainties, his festivals and delights, and all these he found in doing the will of the Lord his God. When law becomes delight, obedience is bliss. Holiness in the heart causes the soul to eat the fat of the land. To have the law for our delight will breed in our hearts the very opposite of the effects of pride: deadness, sensuality, and obstinacy will be cured, and we shall become teachable, sensitive, and spiritual. How careful should we be to live under the influence of the divine law, that we fall not under the law of sin and death!

71. It is good for me that I have been afflicted; that I might learn thy statutes.

"It is good for me that I have been afflicted." Even though the affliction came from bad men, it was over-ruled for good ends; though it was bad as it came from them, it was good for David. It benefited him in many ways, and he knew it. Whatever he may have thought while under the trial, he perceived himself to be the better for it when it was over. It was not good to the proud to be prosperous, for their hearts grew sensual and insensible; but affliction was good for the Psalmist. Our worst is better for us than the sinner's best. It is bad for sinners to rejoice, and good for saints to sorrow. A thousand benefits have come to us through our pains and griefs, and among the rest is this—that we have thus been schooled in the law.

"That I might learn thy statutes." These we have come to know and to keep by feeling the smart of the rod. We prayed the Lord to teach us (Psalms 119:66), and now we see how he has already been doing it. Truly he has dealt well with us, for he has dealt wisely with us. We have been kept from the ignorance of the greasy-hearted by our trials, and this, if there were nothing else, is just cause for constant gratitude. To be larded by prosperity is not good for the proud; but for the truth to be learned by adversity is good for the humble. Very little is to be learned without affliction. If we would be scholars we must be sufferers. As the Latins say, *Experientia docet*, experience teaches. There is no royal road to learning the royal statutes; God's commands are best read by eyes wet with tears.

72. The law of thy mouth is better unto me than thousands of gold and silver.

"The law of thy mouth." A sweetly expressive name for the word of God. It comes from God's own mouth with freshness and power to our souls. Things written are as dried herbs; but speech has a liveliness and dew about it. We do well to look upon the word of the Lord as though it were newly spoken into our ear; for in very truth it is not decayed by years, but is as forcible and sure as though newly uttered. Precepts are prized when it is seen that they come forth from the lips of our Father who is in heaven. The same lips which spoke us into existence have spoken the law by which we are to govern that existence. Whence could a law so sweetly proceed as from the mouth of our covenant God? Well may we prize beyond all price that which comes from such a source!

"Is better unto me than thousands of gold and silver." If a poor man had said this, the world's wittlings would have hinted that the grapes are sour, and that men who have no wealth are the first to despise it; but this is the verdict of a man who owned his thousands, and could judge by actual experience of the value of money and the value of truth. He speaks of great riches, he heaps it up by thousands, he mentions the varieties of its forms—"gold and silver"; and then he sets the word of God before it all, as better to him, even if others did not think it better to them. Wealth is good in some respects, but obedience is better in all respects. It is well to keep the treasures of this life; but far more commendable to keep the law of the Lord. The law is better than gold and silver, for these may be stolen from us, but not the word; these take to themselves wings, but the word of God remains; these are useless in the hour of death, but then it is that the promise is most dear. Instructed Christians recognize the value of the Lord's word, and warmly express it, not only in their testimony to their fellowmen, but in their devotions to God. It is a sure sign of a heart which has learned God's statutes when it prizes them above all earthly possessions; and it is an equally certain mark of grace when the precepts of Scripture are as precious as its promises. The Lord cause us thus to prize the law of his mouth.

See how this portion of the psalm is flavoured with goodness. God's dealings are good (Psalms 119:65), holy judgment is good (66), affliction is good (Psalms 119:67), God is good (Psalms 119:68), and here the law is not only good, but better than the best of treasure. Lord, make us good, through thy good word! Amen.

Exposition of Psalm 119:73-80

Exposition of Psalms 119:73-80 73. THY hands have made me and fashioned me: give me understanding, that I may learn thy commandments.

74. They that fear thee will be glad when they see me; because I have hoped in thy word.

75. I know, O Lord, that thy judgments are right, and that thou in faithfulness hast afflicted me.

76. Let, I pray thee, thy merciful kindness be for my comfort, according to thy word unto thy servant.

77. Let thy tender mercies come unto me, that I may live: for thy law is my delight.

78. Let the proud be ashamed; for they dealt perversely with me without a cause: but I will meditate in thy precepts.

79. Let those that fear thee turn unto me, and those that have known thy testimonies.

80. Let my heart be sound in thy statutes; that I be not ashamed.

We have now come to the tenth portion, which in each stanza begins with Jod; but it certainly does not treat of jots and tittles and other trifles. Its subject would seem to be personal experience and its attractive influence upon others. The prophet is in deep sorrow, but looks to be delivered and made a blessing. Endeavouring to teach, the Psalmist first seeks to be taught (Psalms 119:73), persuades himself that he will be well received (Psalms 119:74), and then repeats the testimony which he intends to bear (Psalms 119:75). He prays for more experience (Psalms 119:76-77), for the baffling of the proud (Psalms 119:78), for the gathering together of the godly to him (Psalms 119:79), and for himself again, that he may be fully equipped for his witness-bearing, and may be sustained in it (Psalms 119:80). This is the anxious yet hopeful cry of one who is heavily afflicted by cruel adversaries, and therefore makes his appeal to God as his only friend.

73. Thy hands have made me and fashioned me: give me understanding, that I may learn thy commandments.

"Thy hands have made me and fashioned me." It is profitable to remember our creation, it is pleasant to see that the divine hand has had much to do with us; for it never moves apart from the divine thought. It excites reverence, gratitude, and affection towards God when we view him as our Maker, putting forth the careful skill and power of his hands in our forming and fashioning. He took a personal interest in us, making us with his own hands; he was doubly thoughtful, for he is represented both as making and moulding us. In both giving existence and arranging existence the Lord manifested love and wisdom; and therefore we find reasons for praise, confidence, and expectation in our being and well-being.

"Give me understanding, that I may learn thy commandments." As thou hast made me, teach me. Here is the vessel which thou hast fashioned; Lord, fill it! Thou hast given me both soul and body;

grant me now thy grace that my soul may know thy will, and my body may join in the performance of it. The plea is very forcible; it is an enlargement of the cry, "Forsake not the work of thine own hands." Without understanding the divine law and rendering obedience to it, we are imperfect and useless; but we may reasonably hope that the great Potter will complete his work, and give the finishing touch to it, by imparting to us sacred knowledge and holy character. If God had roughly made us, and had not also elaborately fashioned us, this argument would lose much of its force; but surely from the delicate art and marvellous skill which the Lord has shown in the formation of the human body, we may infer that he is prepared to take equal pains with the soul, till it shall perfectly bear his image. A man without a mind is an idiot, the mere mockery of a man; and a mind without grace is wicked, the sad perversion of a mind. We pray that we may not be left without spiritual judgment or understanding: this the Psalmist sought in Psalms 119:66, and he here pleads for it again: there is no true knowing and keeping of the commandments without it. Fools can sin; but only those who are taught of God can be holy. We often speak of gifted men; but he has the best gifts to whom God has given a sanctified understanding wherewith to know and prize the ways of the Lord. Note well that David's prayer for understanding is not for the sake of speculative knowledge, and the gratification of his curiosity: he desires an enlightened judgment, that he may learn God's commandments, and so become obedient and holy. This is the best of learning. A man may abide in the College where this science is taught all his days, and yet cry out for ability to learn more. The commandment of God is exceeding broad, and so it affords scope for the most vigorous and instructed mind: in fact, no man has by nature an understanding capable of compassing so wide a field, and hence the prayer, "Give me understanding";—as much as to say—I can learn other things with the mind I have, but thy law is so pure, so perfect, spiritual and sublime, that I need to have my mind enlarged before I can become proficient in it. He appeals to his Maker to do this, as if he felt that no power short of that which made him could make him wise unto holiness. We need a new creation, and who can grant us this but the Creator himself? He who made us to live must make us to learn; he who gave us power to stand must give us grace to understand. Let us each one breathe to heaven the prayer of this verse ere we advance a step further; for we shall be lost even in these petitions unless we pray our way through them, and cry to God for understanding.

74. They that fear thee will be glad when they see me; because I have hoped in thy word. When a man of God obtains grace for himself he becomes a blessing to others, especially if that grace has made him a man of sound understanding and holy knowledge, God-fearing men are encouraged when they meet with experienced believers. A hopeful man is a God-send when things are declining or in danger. When the hopes of one believer are fulfilled, his companions are cheered and established, and led to hope also. It is good for the eyes to see a man whose witness is that the Lord is true; it is one of the joys of saints to hold converse with their more advanced brethren. The fear of God is not a left-handed grace, as some have called it; it is quite consistent with gladness; for if even the sight of a comrade gladdens the God-fearing, how glad must they be in the presence of the Lord himself! We do not only meet to share each other's burdens, but to partake in each other's joys, gracious men contribute largely to the stock of mutual gladness. Hopeful men bring gladness with them. Despondent spirits spread the infection of depression, and hence few are glad to see them; while those whose hopes are grounded upon God's word carry sunshine in their faces, and are welcomed by their fellows. When professors by their freezing words chill all hearts the godly avoid their company. May this never be our character!

75. "I know, O Lord, that thy judgments are right, and that thou in faithfulness hast afflicted me."

"I know, O Lord, that thy judgments are right." He who would learn more must be thankful for what he already knows, and be willing to confess it to the glory of God. The Psalmist had been sorely tried, but he had continued to hope in God under his trial, and now he avows his conviction that he had been justly and wisely chastened. This he not only thought but knew, so that he was positive about it, and spoke without a moment's hesitation. Saints are sure about the rightness of their troubles, even when they cannot see the intent of them. It made the godly glad to hear David say this, "And that thou in faithfulness hast afflicted me." Because love required severity, therefore the Lord exercised it. It was not because God was unfaithful that the believer found himself in a sore strait, but for just the opposite reason: it was the faithfulness of God to his covenant which brought the chosen one under the rod. It might not be needful that others should be tried just then; but it was necessary to the Psalmist, and therefore the Lord did not withhold the blessing. Our heavenly Father is no Eli: he will not suffer his children to sin without rebuke, his love is too intense for that. The man who makes the confession of this verse is already progressing in the school of grace, and is learning the commandments. This third verse of the section corresponds to the third of Teth (Psalms 119:67), and in a degree to several other verses which make the thirds in their octaves.

76. Let, I pray thee, thy merciful kindness be for my comfort, according to thy word unto thy servant.

Having confessed the righteousness of the Lord, he now appeals to his mercy, and while he does not ask that the rod may be removed, he earnestly begs for comfort under it. Righteousness and faithfulness afford us no consolation if we cannot also taste of mercy, and, blessed be God, this is promised us in the word, and therefore we may expect it. The words "merciful kindness" are a happy combination, and express exactly what we need in affliction: mercy to forgive the sin, and kindness to sustain under the sorrow. With these we can be comfortable in the cloudy and dark day, and without them we are wretched indeed; for these, therefore, let us pray unto the Lord, whom we have grieved by our sin, and let us plead the word of his grace as our sole reason for expecting his favour. Blessed be his name, notwithstanding our faults we are still his servants, and we serve a compassionate Master. Some read the last clause, "according to thy saying unto thy servant"; some special saying of the Lord was remembered and pleaded: can we not remember some such "faithful saying," and make it the groundwork of our petitioning? That phrase, "according to thy word," is a very favourite one; it shows the motive for mercy and the manner of mercy. Our prayers are according to the mind of God when they are according to the word of God.

77. "Let thy tender mercies come unto me, that I may live: for thy law is my delight."

"Let thy tender mercies come unto me, that I may live." He was so hard pressed that he was at death's door if God did not succour him. He needed not only mercy, but "mercies," and these must be of a very gracious and considerate kind, even "tender mercies," for he was sore with his wounds. These gentle favours must be of the Lord's giving, for nothing less would suffice; and they must "come" all the way to the sufferer's heart, for he was not able to journey after them; all he could do was to sigh out, "Oh that they would come"! If deliverance did not soon come, he felt ready to expire; and yet he told us but a verse or so ago that he hoped in God's word: how true it is that hope lives on when death seems written on all besides! A heathen said, "dum spiro spero," while I breathe I hope; but the Christian can say, "dum expiro spero," even when I expire I still

expect the blessing. Yet no true child of God can live without the tender mercy of the Lord; it is death to him to be under God's displeasure. Notice, again, the happy combination of the words of our English version. Was there ever a sweeter sound than this—"tender mercies"? He who has been grievously afflicted, and yet tenderly succoured, is the only man who knows the meaning of such choice language.

How truly we live when tender mercy comes to us! Then we do not merely exist, but live; we are lively, full of life, vivacious, and vigorous. We know not what life is till we know God. Some are said to die by the visitation of God, but we live by it.

"For thy law is my delight." O blessed faith! He is no mean believer who rejoices in the law even when its broken precepts cause him to suffer. To delight in the word when it rebukes us, is proof that we are profiting under it. Surely this is a plea which will prevail with God, however bitter our griefs may be; if we still delight in the law of the Lord he cannot let us die, he must and will cast a tender look upon us, and comfort our hearts.

78. Let the proud be ashamed; for they dealt perversely with me without a cause: but I will meditate in thy precepts.

"Let the proud be ashamed." He begged that the judgments of God might no longer fall upon himself, but upon his cruel adversaries. God will not suffer those who hope in his word to be put to shame, for he reserves that reward for haughty spirits: they shall yet be overtaken with confusion, and become the subjects of contempt, while God's afflicted ones shall again lift up their heads. Shame is for the proud, for it is a shameful thing to be proud. Shame is not for the holy, for there is nothing in holiness to be ashamed of.

"For they dealt perversely with me without a cause." Their malice was wanton, he had not provoked them. Falsehood was employed to forge an accusation against him; they had to bend his actions out of their true shape before they could assail his character. Evidently the Psalmist keenly felt the malice of his foes. His consciousness of innocence with regard to them created a burning sense of injustice, and he appealed to the righteous Lord to take his part and clothe his false accusers with shame. Probably he mentioned them as "the proud," because he knew that the Lord always takes vengeance on proud men, and vindicates the cause of those whom they oppress. Sometimes he mentions the proud, and sometimes the wicked, but he always means the same persons; the words are interchangeable: he who is proud is sure to be wicked, and proud persecutors are the worst of wicked men.

"But I will meditate in thy precepts." He would leave the proud in God's hands, and give himself up to holy studies and contemplations. To obey the divine precepts we have need to know them, and think much of them, hence this persecuted saint felt that meditation must be his chief employment. He would study the law of God, and not the law of retaliation. The proud are not worth a thought. The worst injury they can do us is to take us away from our devotions; let us baffle them by keeping all the closer to our God when they are most malicious in their onslaughts. In a similar position to this we have met with the proud in other octaves, and shall meet them yet again. They are evidently a great plague to the Psalmist, but he rises above them.

79. Let those that fear thee turn unto me, and those that have known thy testimonies.

Perhaps the tongue of slander had alienated some of the godly, and probably the actual faults of David had grieved many more. He begs God to turn to him, and then to turn his people towards him. Those who are right with God are also anxious to be right with his children. David craved the love and sympathy of gracious men of all grades—of those who were beginners in grace, and of those who were mature in piety—"those that fear thee," and "those that have known thy testimonies." We cannot afford to lose the love of the least of the saints; and if we have lost their esteem we may most properly pray to have it restored. David was the leader of the godly party in the nation, and it wounded him to the heart when he perceived that those who feared God were not as glad to see him as aforetime they had been. He did not bluster, and say that if they could do without him he could very well do without them; but he so deeply felt the value of their sympathy, that he made it a matter of prayer that the Lord would turn their hearts to him again. Those who are dear to God, and are instructed in his word, should be very precious in our eyes, and we should do our utmost to be upon good terms with them.

David has two descriptions for the saints: they are God-fearing and God-knowing. They possess both devotion and instruction; they have both the spirit and the science of true religion. We know some believers who are gracious, but not intelligent; and, on the other hand, we also know certain professors who have all head and no heart: he is the man who combines devotion with intelligence. We neither care for devout dunces nor for intellectual icebergs. When fearing and knowing walk hand in hand they cause men to be thoroughly furnished unto every good work. If those choice spirits who both love God and learn of God are my favourite companions I may hope that I am one of their order. Grant, O Lord, that such persons ever turn to me because they find in me congenial company!

80. Let my heart be sound in thy statutes: that I be not ashamed. This is even more important than to be held in esteem by good men. This is the root of the matter. If the heart be sound in obedience to God, all is well, or will be well. If right at heart we are right in the main. If we be not sound before God, our name for piety is an empty sound. Mere profession will fail, and undeserved esteem will disappear like a bubble when it bursts; only sincerity and truth will endure in the evil day. He who is right at heart has no reason for shame, and he never shall have any. Hypocrites ought to be ashamed now, and they shall one day be put to shame without end: their hearts are rotten, and their names shall rot. This eightieth verse is a variation of the prayer of the seventy-third verse; there the Psalmist sought sound understanding, here he goes deeper, and begs for a sound heart. Those who have learned their own frailty by sad experience, are led to dive beneath the surface, and cry to the Lord for truth in the inward parts. In closing the consideration of these eight verses, let us join with the writer in the prayer, "Let my heart be sound in thy statutes."

Exposition of Psalm 119:81-88

Exposition of Psalms 119:81-88 81. MY soul fainteth for thy salvation: but I hope in thy word.

82. Mine eyes fail for thy word, saying, When wilt thou comfort me?

83. For I am become like a bottle in the smoke; yet do I not forget thy statutes.

84. How many are the days of thy servant? when wilt thou execute judgment on them that persecute me?

85. The proud have digged pits for me, which are not after thy law.

86. All thy commandments are faithful: they persecute me wrongfully; help thou me.

87. They had almost consumed me upon earth; but I forsook not thy precepts.

88. Quicken me after thy lovingkindness; so shall I keep the testimony of thy mouth. This portion of the gigantic psalm sees the Psalmist in extremis. His enemies have brought him to the lowest condition of anguish and depression; yet he is faithful to the law, and trustful in his God. This octave is the midnight of the psalm, and very dark and black it is. Stars, however, shine out, and the last verse gives promise of the dawn. The strain will after this become more cheerful; but meanwhile it should minister comfort to us to see so eminent a servant of God so hardly used by the ungodly. Evidently in our own persecutions, no strange thing has happened unto us.

81. My soul fainteth for thy salvation: but I hope in thy word.

"My soul fainteth for thy salvation." He wished for no deliverance but that which came from God: his one desire was for "thy salvation." But for that divine deliverance he was eager to the last degree—up to the full measure of his strength, yea, and beyond it, till he fainted. So strong was his desire that it produced prostration of spirit. He grew weary with waiting, faint with watching, sick with urgent need. Thus the sincerity and eagerness of his desires were proved. Nothing else could satisfy him but deliverance wrought out by the hand of God; his inmost nature yearned and pined for salvation from the God of all grace, and he must have it or utterly fail. "But I hope in thy word." Therefore he felt that salvation would come; for God cannot break his promise, nor disappoint the hope which his own word has excited: yea, the fulfilment of his word is near at hand when our hope is firm and our desire fervent. Hope alone can keep the soul from fainting by using the smelling-bottle of the promise. Yet hope does not quench desire for a speedy answer to prayer; it increases our importunity, for it both stimulates ardour and sustains the heart under delays. To faint for salvation, and to be kept from utterly failing of the hope of it, is the frequent experience of the Christian man. We are "faint yet pursuing." Hope sustains when desire exhausts. While the grace of desire throws us down, the grace of hope lifts us up again.

82. Mine eyes fail for thy word, saying, When wilt thou comfort me? His eyes gave out with eagerly gazing for the kind appearance of the Lord, while his heart in weariness cried out for speedy comfort. To read the word till the eyes can no longer see is but a small thing compared with

watching for the fulfilment of the promise till the inner eyes of expectancy begin to grow dim with hope deferred. We may not set times to God, for this is to limit the Holy One of Israel; yet we may urge our suit with importunity, and make fervent enquiry as to why the promise tarries. David sought no comfort except that which comes from God; his question is, "When wilt thou comfort me?" If help does not come from heaven it will never come at all: all the good man's hopes look that way, he has not a glance to dart in any other direction. This experience of waiting and fainting is well-known by full-grown saints, and it teaches them many precious lessons which they would never learn by any other means. Among the choice results is this one—that the body rises into sympathy with the soul, both heart and flesh cry out for the living God, and even the eyes find a tongue, "saying, When wilt thou comfort me?" It must be an intense longing which is not satisfied to express itself by the lips, but speaks with the eyes, by those eyes failing through intense watching. Eyes can speak right eloquently; they use both mutes and liquids, and can sometimes say more than tongues. David says in another place, "The Lord hath heard the voice of my weeping" (Ps. vi. 8). Specially are our eyes eloquent when they begin to fail with weariness and woe. A humble eye lifted up to heaven in silent prayer may flash such flame as shall melt the bolts which bar the entrance of vocal prayer, and so heaven shall be taken by storm with the artillery of tears. Blessed are the eyes that are strained in looking after God. The eyes of the Lord will see to it that such eyes do not actually fail. How much better to watch for the Lord with aching eyes than to have them sparkling at the glitter of vanity!

83. For I am become like a bottle in the smoke; yet do I not forget thy statutes.

"For I am become like a bottle in the smoke." The skins used for containing wine, when emptied, were hung up in the tent, and when the place reeked with smoke the skins grew black and sooty, and in the heat they became wrinkled and worn. The Psalmist's face through sorrow had become dark and dismal, furrowed and lined; indeed, his whole body had so sympathized with his sorrowing mind as to have lost its natural moisture, and to have become like a skin dried and tanned. His character had been smoked with slander, and his mind parched with persecution; he was half afraid that he would become useless and incapable through so much mental suffering, and that men would look upon him as an old worn-out skin bottle, which could hold nothing, and answer no purpose. What a metaphor for a man to use who was certainly a poet, a divine, and a master in Israel, if not a king, and a man after God's own heart! It is little wonder if we, commoner folk, are made to think very little of ourselves, and are filled with distress of mind. Some of us know the inner meaning of this simile, for we, too, have felt dingy, mean, and worthless, only fit to be cast away. Very black and hot has been the smoke which has enveloped us; it seemed to come not alone from the Egyptian furnace, but from the bottomless pit; and it had a clinging power which made the soot of it fasten upon us and blacken us with miserable thoughts.

"Yet do I not forget thy statutes." Here is the patience of the saints and the victory of faith. Blackened the man of God might be by falsehood, but the truth was in him, and he never gave it up. He was faithful to his King when he seemed deserted and left to the vilest uses. The promises came to his mind, and, what was still better evidence of his loyalty, the statutes were there too: he stuck to his duties as well as to his comforts. The worst circumstances cannot destroy the true believer's hold upon his God. Grace is a living power which survives that which would suffocate all other forms of existence. Fire cannot consume it, and smoke cannot smother it. A man may be reduced to skin and bone, and all his comfort may be dried out of him, and yet he may hold fast his

integrity and glorify his God. It is, however, no marvel that in such a case the eyes which are tormented with the smoke cry out for the Lord's delivering hand, and the heart, heated and faint, longs for the divine salvation.

84. How many are the days of thy servant? when wilt thou execute judgment on them that persecute me?

"How many are the days of thy servant?" I cannot hope to live long in such a condition; thou must come speedily to my rescue or I shall die. Shall all my short life be consumed in such destroying sorrows? The brevity of life is a good argument against the length of an affliction. Lord, since I am to live so short a time, be pleased to shorten my sorrow also.

Perhaps the Psalmist means that his days seemed too many since they were spent in such distress. He half wished that they were ended, and therefore he asked in trouble, "How many are the days of thy servant?" Long life now seemed a calamity rather than a benediction. Like a hired servant, he had a certain term to serve, and he would not complain of what he had to bear; but still the time seemed long because his griefs were so heavy. No one knows the appointed number of our days except the Lord, and therefore to him the appeal is made that he would not prolong them beyond his servant's strength. It cannot be the Lord's mind that his own servant should always be treated so unjustly; there must be an end to it; when would it be?

"When wilt thou execute judgment on them that persecute me?" He had placed his case in the Lord's hands, and he prayed that sentence might be given and put into execution. He desired nothing but justice, that his character might be cleared and his persecutors silenced. He knew that God would certainly avenge his own elect, but the day of rescue tarried, the hours dragged heavily along, and the persecuted one cried day and night for deliverance.

85. The proud have digged pits for me, which are not after thy law. As men who hunt wild beasts are wont to make pitfalls and snares, so did David's foes endeavour to entrap him. They went laboriously and cunningly to work to ruin him, "they digged pits"; not one, but many. If one would not take him, perhaps another would, and so they digged again and again. One would think that such haughty people would not have soiled their fingers with digging; but they swallowed their pride in hopes of swallowing their victim. Whereas they ought to have been ashamed of such meanness, they were conscious of no shame, but, on the contrary, were proud of their cleverness; proud of setting a trap for a godly man. "Which are not after thy law." Neither the men nor their pits were according to the divine law: they were cruel and crafty deceivers, and their pits were contrary to the Levitical law, and contrary to the command which bids us love our neighbour. If men would keep to the statutes of the Lord, they would lift the fallen out of the pit, or fill up the pit so that none might stumble into it; but they would never spend a moment in working injury to others. When, however, they become proud, they are sure to despise others; and for this reason they seek to circumvent them, that they may afterwards hold them up to ridicule.

It was well for David that his enemies were God's enemies, and that their attacks upon him had no sanction from the Lord. It was also much to his gain that he was not ignorant of their devices, for he was thus put upon his guard, and led to watch his ways lest he should fall into their pits. While he kept to the law of the Lord he was safe, though even then it was an uncomfortable thing to have his path made dangerous by the craft of wanton malice.

86. All thy commandments are faithful: they persecute me wrongfully; help thou me.

"All thy commandments are faithful." He had no fault to find with God's law, even though he had fallen into sad trouble through obedience to it. Whatever the command might cost him, it was worth it; he felt that God's way might be rough, but it was right; it might make him enemies, but still it was his best friend. He believed that in the end God's command would turn out to his own profit, and that he should be no loser by obeying it.

"They persecute me wrongfully." The fault lay with his persecutors, and neither with his God nor with himself. He had done no injury to anyone, nor acted otherwise than according to truth and justice; therefore he confidently appeals to his God, and cries, "Help thou me." This is a golden prayer, as precious as it is short. The words are few, but the meaning is full. Help was needed that the persecuted one might avoid the snare, might bear up under reproach, and might act so prudently as to baffle his foes. God's help is our hope. Whoever may hurt us, it matters not so long as the Lord helps us; for if indeed the Lord help us, none can really hurt us. Many a time have these words been groaned out by troubled saints, for they are such as suit a thousand conditions of need, pain, distress, weakness, and sin. "Help, Lord," will be a fitting prayer for youth and age, for labour and suffering, for life and death. No other help is sufficient, but God's help is all-sufficient, and we cast ourselves upon it without fear.

87. They had almost consumed me upon earth; but I forsook not thy precepts.

"They had almost consumed me upon earth." His foes had almost destroyed him so as to make him altogether fail. If they could they would have eaten him, or burned him alive; anything so that they could have made a full end of the good man. Evidently he had fallen under their power to a large extent, and they had so used that power that he was well-nigh consumed. He was almost gone from off the earth; but almost is not altogether, and so he escaped by the skin of his teeth. The lions are chained: they can rage no further than our God permits. The Psalmist perceives the limit of their power: they could at the utmost only consume him "upon the earth:" they could touch his earthly life and earthly goods. Upon earth they almost ate him up, but he had an eternal portion which they could not even nibble at.

"But I forsook not thy precepts." Neither fear, nor pain, nor loss, could make David turn out of the plain way of God's command. Nothing could drive him from obeying the Lord. If we stick to the precepts we shall be rescued by the promises. If ill-usage could have driven the oppressed saint from the way of right, the purpose of the wicked would have been answered, and we should have heard no more of David: but through divine grace he was not overcome of evil. If we are resolved to die sooner than forsake the Lord, we may depend upon it that we shall not die, but shall live to see the overthrow of them that hate us.

88. Quicken me after thy lovingkindness; so shall I keep the testimony of thy mouth.

"Quicken me after thy lovingkindness." Most wise, most blessed prayer! If we are revived in our own personal piety we shall be out of reach of our assailants. Our best protection from tempters and persecutors is more life. Lovingkindness itself cannot do us greater service than by making us to have life more abundantly. When we are quickened we are able to bear affliction, to baffle cunning, and to conquer sin. We look to the lovingkindness of God as the source of spiritual revival, and we entreat the Lord to quicken us, not according to our deserts, but after the

boundless energy of his grace. What a blessed word is this "lovingkindness"! Take it to pieces, and admire its double force of love.

"So shall I keep the testimony of thy mouth." If quickened by the Holy Ghost we shall keep God's testimony by a holy character. We shall also be faithful to sound doctrine when the Spirit visits us and makes us faithful. None keep the word of the Lord's mouth unless the word of the Lord's mouth quickens them. We ought greatly to admire the spiritual prudence of the Psalmist, who does not so much pray for freedom from trial as for renewed life that he may be supported under it. When the inner life is vigorous all is well. David prayed for a sound heart in the closing verse of the last octave, and here he seeks a revived heart; this is going to the root of the matter, by seeking that which is the most needful of all things. Lord, let it be heart-work with us, and let our hearts be right with thee.

Exposition of Psalm 119:89-96

Exposition of Psalms 119:89-96 89. FOR ever, O Lord, thy word is settled in heaven.

90. Thy faithfulness is unto all generations: thou hast established the earth, and it abideth.

91. They continue this day according to thine ordinances: for all are thy servants.

92. Unless thy law had been my delights, I should then have perished in mine affliction.

93. I will never forget thy precepts: for with them thou hast quickened me.

94. I am thine, save me; for I have sought thy precepts.

95. The wicked have waited for me to destroy me: but I will consider thy testimonies.

96. I have seen an end of all perfection: but thy commandment is exceeding broad.

89. "For ever, O Lord, thy word is settled in heaven." The strain is more joyful, for experience has given the sweet singer a comfortable knowledge of the word of the Lord, and this makes a glad theme. After tossing about on a sea of trouble, the Psalmist here leaps to shore and stands upon a rock. Jehovah's word is not fickle nor uncertain; it is settled, determined, fixed, sure, immovable. Man's teachings change so often that there is never time for them to be settled; but the Lord's word is from of old the same, and will remain unchanged eternally. Some men are never happier than when they are unsettling everything and everybody; but God's mind is not with them. The power and glory of heaven have confirmed each sentence which the mouth of the Lord has spoken, and so confirmed it that to all eternity it must stand the same—settled in heaven, where nothing can reach it. In the former section David's soul fainted, but here the good man looks out of self and perceives that the Lord fainteth not, neither is weary, neither is there any failure in his word. The verse takes the form of an ascription of praise: the faithfulness and immutability of God are fit themes for holy song, and when we are tired with gazing upon the shifting scene of this life, the thought of the immutable promise fills our mouth with singing. God's purposes, promises, and precepts are all settled in his own mind, and none of them shall be disturbed. Covenant settlements will not be removed, however unsettled the thoughts of men may become; let us therefore settle it in our minds that we abide in the faith of our Jehovah as long as we have any being.

90. Thy faithfulness is unto all generations: thou hast established the earth, and it abideth.

"Thy faithfulness is unto all generations." This is an additional glory: God is not affected by the lapse of ages; he is not only faithful to one man throughout his lifetime, but to his children's children after him, yea, and to all generations so long as they keep his covenant and remember his commandments to do them. The promises are ancient things, yet they are not worn out by centuries of use, for the divine faithfulness endureth for ever. He who succoured his servants thousands of years ago still shows himself strong on the behalf of all them that trust in him. "Thou hast established the earthy and it abideth." Nature is governed by fixed laws; the globe keeps its

course by the divine command, and displays no erratic movements: the seasons observe their predestined order, the sea obeys the rule of ebb and flow, and all things else are marshalled in their appointed order. There is an analogy between the word of God and the works of God, and specially in this, that they are both of them constant, fixed, and unchangeable. God's word which established the world is the same as that which he has embodied in the Scriptures; by the word of the Lord were the heavens made, and specially by him who is emphatically the WORD. When we see the world keeping its place, and all its laws abiding the same, we have herein assurance that the Lord will be faithful to his covenant, and will not allow the faith of his people to be put to shame. If the earth abideth, the spiritual creation will abide; if God's word suffices to establish the world, surely it is enough for the establishment of the individual believer. There will come a time when the earth shall pass away, but even then the Word of the Lord will stand: wherefore let us be steadfast, unmovable.

91. They continue this day according to thine ordinances: for all are thy servants.

"They continue this day according to thine ordinances" Because the Lord has bid the universe abide, therefore it stands, and all its laws continue to operate with precision and power. Because the might of God is ever present to maintain them, therefore do all things continue. The word which spake all things into existence has supported them till now, and still supports them both in being and in well-being. God's ordinance is the reason for the continued existence of creation. What important forces these ordinances are! How much are all ordinances of God to be had in reverence!

"For all are thy servants." Created at first by thy word, they obey that word, thus answering the purpose of their existence, and working out the design of their Creator. Both great things and small pay homage to the Lord. No atom escapes his rule, no world avoids his government. Shall we wish to be free of the Lord's sway and become lords unto ourselves? If we were so, we should be dreadful exceptions to a law which secures the well-being of the universe. Rather while we read concerning all things else—they continue and they serve, let us continue to serve, and to serve more perfectly as our lives are continued. By that word which is settled may we be settled; by that voice which establishes the earth may we be established; and by that command which all created things obey may we be made the servants of the Lord God Almighty.

92. Unless thy law had been my delights, I should then have perished in mine affliction. That word which has preserved the heavens and the earth also preserves the people of God in their time of trial. With that word we are charmed; it is a mine of delight to us. We take a double and treble delight in it, and derive a multiplied delight from it, and this stands us in good stead when all other delights are taken from us. We should have felt ready to lie down and die of our griefs if the spiritual comforts of God's word had not uplifted us; but by their sustaining influence we have been borne above all the depressions and despairs which naturally grow out of severe affliction. Some of us can set our seal to this statement. Our affliction, if it had not been for divine grace, would have crushed us out of existence, so that we should have perished. In our darkest seasons nothing has kept us from desperation but the promise of the Lord: yea, at times nothing has stood between us and self-destruction save faith in the eternal word of God. When worn with pain until the brain has become dazed and the reason well-nigh extinguished, a sweet text has whispered to us its heart-cheering assurance, and our poor struggling mind has reposed upon the bosom of

God. That which was our delight in prosperity has been our light in adversity; that which in the day kept us from presuming has in the night kept us from perishing. This verse contains a mournful supposition—"unless"; describes a horrible condition—"perished in mine affliction"; and implies a glorious deliverance; for he did not die, but he lived to proclaim the honours of the word of God.

93. I will never forget thy precepts: for with them thou hast quickened me. When we have felt the quickening power of a precept we never can forget it. We may read it, learn it, repeat it, and think we have it, and yet it may slip out of our minds; but if it has once given us life, or renewed our life, there is no fear of its falling from our recollection. Experience teaches, and teaches effectually. How blessed a thing it is to have the precepts written on the heart with the golden pen of experience, and graven on the memory with the divine stylus of grace! Forgetfulness is a great evil in holy things; we see here the man of God fighting against it, and feeling sure of victory because he knew the life-giving energy of the word in his own soul. That which quickens the heart is sure to quicken the memory.

It seems singular that he should ascribe quickening to the precepts, and yet it lies in them and in all the words of the Lord alike. It is to be noted that when the Lord raised the dead he addressed to them the word of command. He said, "Lazarus, come forth," or, "Maid, arise." We need not fear to address gospel precepts to dead sinners, since by them the Spirit gives them life. Remark that the Psalmist does not say that the precepts quickened him, but that the Lord quickened him by their means: thus he traces the life from the channel to the source, and places the glory where it is due. Yet at the same time he prized the instruments of the blessing, and resolved never to forget them. He had already remembered them when he likened himself to a bottle in the smoke, and now he feels that whether in the smoke or in the fire the memory of the Lord's precepts shall never depart from him.

94. I am thine, save me; for I have sought thy precepts.

"I am thine, save me." A comprehensive prayer with a prevailing argument. Consecration is a good plea for preservation. If we are conscious that we are the Lord's we may be confident that he will save us. We are the Lord's by creation, election, redemption, surrender, and acceptance; and hence our firm hope and assured belief that he will save us. A man will surely save his own child: Lord, save me. The need of salvation is better seen by the Lord's people than by any others, and hence the prayer of each one of them is—"save me"; they know that only God can save them, and hence they cry to him alone; they know that no merit can be found in themselves, and hence they urge a reason fetched from the grace of God—"I am thine."

"For I have sought thy precepts." Thus had he proved that he was the Lord's. He had not attained to all the holiness which he desired, but he had studiously aimed at being obedient, and hence he begged to be saved even to the end. A man may be seeking the doctrines and the promises, and yet be unrenewed in heart; but to seek the precepts is a sure sign of grace; no one ever heard of a rebel or a hypocrite seeking the precepts. The Lord had evidently wrought a great work upon the Psalmist, and therefore he besought him to complete it. Saving is linked with seeking—"save me, for I have sought"; and when the Lord sets us seeking he will grant us the saving. He who seeks holiness is already saved: if we have sought the Lord we may be sure that the Lord has sought us, and that he will certainly save us.

95. The wicked have waited for me to destroy me: but I will consider thy testimonies.

They were like wild beasts crouching by the way, or highwaymen waylaying a defenceless traveller; but the Psalmist went on his way without considering them, for he was considering something better, namely, the witness or testimony which God has given to the sons of men. He did not allow the malice of the wicked to take him off from his holy study of the divine word. He was so calm that he could "consider"; so holy that he loved to consider the Lord's "testimonies"; so victorious over all their plots that he did not allow them to drive him from his pious contemplations. If the enemy cannot cause us to withdraw our thoughts from holy study, or our feet from holy walking, or our hearts from holy aspirations, he has met with poor success in his assault. The wicked are the natural enemies of holy men and holy thoughts; if they could, they would not only damage us, but destroy us; and if they cannot do this today they will wait for further opportunities, ever hoping that their evil designs may be compassed. They have waited hitherto in vain, and they will have to wait much longer yet; for if we are so unmoved that we do not even give them a thought, their hope of destroying us must be a very poor one.

Note the double waiting—the patience of the wicked who watch long and carefully for an opportunity to destroy the godly, and then the patience of the saint who will not quit his meditations, even to quiet his foes. See how the serpent seed lie in wait as an adder that biteth at the horse's heels; but see how the chosen of the Lord live above their venom, and take no more notice of them than if they had no existence.

96. I have seen an end of all perfection: but thy commandment is exceeding broad.

"I have seen an end of all perfection." He had seen its limit, for it went but a little way; he had seen its evaporation under the trials of life, its detection under the searching glance of truth, its exposure by the confession of the penitent. There is no perfection beneath the moon. Perfect men, in the absolute sense of the word, live only in a perfect world. Some men see no end to their own perfection, but this is because they are perfectly blind. The experienced believer has seen an end of all perfection in himself, in his brethren, in the best man's best works. It would be well if some who profess to be perfect could even see the beginning of perfection; for we fear they cannot have begun aright, or they would not talk so exceeding proudly. Is it not the beginning of perfection to lament your imperfection? There is no such thing as perfection in anything which is the work of man.

"But thy commandment is exceeding broad." When the exceeding breadth of the law is known the notion of perfection in the flesh vanishes: that law touches every act, word, and thought, and is of such a spiritual nature that it judges the motives, desires, and emotions of the soul. It reveals a perfection which convicts us for shortcomings as well as for transgressions, and does not allow us to make up for deficiencies in one direction by special carefulness in others. The divine ideal of holiness is far too broad for us to hope to cover all its wide area, and yet it is no broader than it ought to be. Who would wish to have an imperfect law? Nay, its perfection is its glory; but it is the death of all glorying in our own perfection. There is a breadth about the commandment which has never been met to the full by a corresponding breadth of holiness in any mere man while here below; only in Jesus do we see it fully embodied. The law is in all respects a perfect code; each separate commandment of it is far-reaching in its hallowed meaning, and the whole ten cover all, and leave no space wherein to please our passions. We may well adore the infinity of divine

holiness, and then measure ourselves by its standard, and bow before the Lord in all lowliness, acknowledging how far we fall short of it.

Exposition of Psalm 119:97-104

Exposition of Psalms 119:97-104 97. O HOW love I thy law! it is my meditation all the day.

98. Thou through thy commandments hast made me wiser than mine enemies: for they are ever with me 99. I have more understanding than all my teachers: for thy testimonies are my meditation.

100. I understand more than the ancients, because I keep thy precepts.

101. I Have refrained my feet from every evil way, that I might keep thy word.

102. I have not departed from thy judgments: for thou hast taught me.

103. How sweet are thy words unto my taste! yea, sweeter than honey to my mouth!

104. Through thy precepts I get understanding: therefore I hate every false way.

97. O how love I thy law! it is my meditation all the day.

"O how love I thy law!" It is a note of exclamation. He loves so much that he must express his love, and express it to God in rapturous devotion. In making the attempt he perceives that his emotion is inexpressible, and therefore he cries, "O how I love!" We not only reverence but love the law, we obey it out of love, and even when it chides us for disobedience we love it none the less. The law is God's law, and therefore it is our love. We love it for its holiness, and pine to be holy; we love it for its wisdom, and study to be wise; we love it for its perfection, and long to be perfect. Those who know the power of the gospel perceive an infinite loveliness in the law as they see it fulfilled and embodied in Christ Jesus.

"It is my meditation all the day." This was both the effect of his love to the law and the cause of that love. He meditated in God's word because he loved it, and loved it the more because he meditated in it He could not have enough of it, so ardently did he love it; all the day was not too long for his converse with it. His matin prayer, his noonday thought, his evensong were all out of Holy Writ; yea, in his worldly business he still kept his mind saturated with the law of the Lord. It is said of some men that the more you know them the less you admire them; but the reverse is true of God's word. Familiarity with the word of God breeds affection, and affection seeks yet greater familiarity. When "thy law" and "my meditation" are together all the day, the day grows holy, devout, and happy, and the heart lives with God in love to his Word, and delight therein. David turned away from all else but the word and will of the Lord, for in the preceding verse he tells us that he had seen an end of all perfection; but he turned in unto the law and tarried there the whole day of his life on earth, growing henceforth wiser and holier.

98. Thou through thy commandments hast made me wiser than mine enemies: for they are ever with me.

"Thou through thy commandments hast made me wiser than mine enemies." The commandments were his book, but God was his teacher. The letter can make us knowing, but only the divine Spirit can make us wise. Wisdom is knowledge put to practical use. Wisdom comes to us through obedience: "If any man will do his will he shall know of the doctrine." We learn not only from promise, and doctrine, and sacred history, but also from precept and command: in fact, from the commandments we gather the most practical wisdom, and that which enables us best to cope with our adversaries. A holy life is the highest wisdom and the surest defence. Our enemies are renowned for subtlety, from the first father of them, the old serpent, down to the last cockatrice that has been hatched from the egg; and it would be vain for us to try to be a match with them in the craft and mystery of cunning; for the children of this world are in their generation wiser than the children of light. We must go to another school and learn of a different instructor, and then by uprightness we shall baffle fraud, by simple truth we shall vanquish deep-laid scheming, and by open candour we shall defeat slander. A thoroughly straightforward man, devoid of all policy, is a terrible puzzle to diplomatists; they suspect him of a subtle duplicity through which they cannot see; while he, indifferent to their suspicions, holds on the even tenor of his way, and baffles all their arts. Yes, "honesty is the best policy." He who is taught of God has a practical wisdom such as malice cannot supply to the crafty; while harmless as a dove, he also exhibits more than the serpent's wisdom.

"For they are ever with me." He was always studying or obeying the commandments; they were his choice and constant companions. If we wish to become proficient we must be indefatigable. If we keep the wise law ever near us we shall become wise, and when our adversaries assail us we shall be prepared for them with that ready wit which lies in having the word of God at our fingers' ends. As a soldier in battle must never lay aside his shield, so must we never have the word of God out of our minds; it must be ever with us.

99. I have more understanding than all my teachers: for thy testimonies are my meditation.

"I have more understanding than all my teachers." That which the Lord had taught him had been useful in the camp, and now he finds it equally valuable in the schools. Our teachers are not always to be trusted; in fact, we may not follow any of them implicitly, for God will call us to account for the use of our understandings. When even our pilot errs, it behoves us to follow closely the chart of the Word of God, that we may be able to save the vessel. If our teachers are in all things sound and safe, they will be right glad for us to excel them, and they will be the first to own that the teaching of the Lord is better than any teaching which they can give us. Disciples of Christ who sit at his feet are often better skilled in divine things than doctors of divinity.

"For thy testimonies are my meditation." Meditation upon the Scripture itself is the best mode of acquiring understanding. We may hear the wisest teachers and remain fools, but if we meditate upon the sacred word we must become wise. There is more wisdom in the testimonies of the Lord than in all the teachings of men if they were all gathered into one vast library. The Book of books outweighs all the rest.

David does not hesitate to speak the truth in this place concerning himself, even though it is to his own honour, for he is quite innocent of self-consciousness. In speaking of his "understanding" he means to extol the law and the Lord, and not himself. There is not a grain of boasting in these bold expressions, but only a childlike desire to set forth the excellence of the Lord's word. He who

knows the truths taught in the Bible will be guilty of no egotism if he believes himself to be possessed of more important truth than all the agnostic professors in the universe.

100. I understand more than the ancients, because I keep thy precepts. The men of old age, and the men of old time, were outdone by the holier and more youthful learner. He had been taught to observe in heart and life the precepts of the Lord, and this was more than the most venerable sinner had ever learned, more than the philosopher of antiquity had so much as aspired to know. He had the word with him, and so outstripped his foes; he meditated on it, and so outran his friends; he practised it, and so outshone his elders. The instruction derived from Holy Scripture is useful in many directions, superior from many points of view, unrivalled everywhere and in every way. As our soul may make her boast in the Lord, so may we boast in his word. "There is none like it: give it me," said David as to Goliath's sword, and we may say the same as to the word of the Lord. If men prize antiquity they have it here. The ancients are had in high repute; but what did they all know compared with that which we perceive in the divine precepts? "The old is better" says one: but the oldest of all is the best of all, and what is that but the word of the Ancient of days.

101. I have refrained my feet from every evil way, that I might keep thy word.

There is no treasuring up the holy word unless there is a casting out of all unholiness: if we keep the good word, we must let go the evil. David had zealously watched his steps and put a check upon his conduct—he had refrained his feet No one evil way could entice him, for he knew that if he only went astray in one road he had practically left the way of righteousness; therefore he avoided every foul way. The by-paths were smooth and flowery, but he knew right well that they were evil, and so he turned his feet away, and plodded along the strait and thorny pathway which leads to God. It is a pleasure to look back upon self-conquests—"I have refrained," and a greater delight still to know that we did this out of no mere desire to stand well with our fellows, but with the one motive of keeping the law of the Lord. Sin avoided that obedience may be perfected is the essence of this verse; or it may be that the Psalmist would teach us that there is no real reverence for the book where there is not carefulness to avoid every transgression of its precepts. How can we as servants of the Lord keep his word if we do not keep our own works and words from bringing dishonour upon it?

102. I have not departed from thy judgments: for thou hast taught me.

They are well taught whom God teaches. What we learn from the Lord we never forget. God's instruction has a practical effect—we follow his way when he teaches us; and it has an abiding effect—we do not depart from holiness. Read this verse in connection with the preceding, and you get the believer's "I have," and his "I have not": he is good both positively and negatively. What he did, namely, "refrained his feet," preserved him from doing that which otherwise he might have done, namely, "departed from thy judgments." He who is careful not to go an inch aside will not leave the road. He who never touches the intoxicating cup will never be drunk. He who never utters an idle word will never be profane. If we begin to depart a little, we can never tell where we shall end. The Lord brings us to persevere in holiness by abstinence from the beginning of sin; but whatever be the method, he is the worker of our perseverance, and to him be all the glory.

God's word pronounces judgments as to moral actions, and we shall do well to maintain those judgments as our infallible rule of thought and life.

103. How sweet are thy words unto my taste! yea, sweeter than honey to my mouth!

"How sweet are thy words unto my taste!" He had not only heard the words of God, but fed upon them: they affected his palate as well as his ear: they had an inward effect on his taste as well as an outward effect on his hearing. God's words are many and varied, and the whole of them make up what we call "the word": David loved them each one, individually, and the whole of them as a whole, and therefore he tasted an indescribable sweetness in them. He expresses the fact of their sweetness; but as he cannot express the degree of their sweetness he cries, "How sweet!" Being God's words they were divinely sweet to God's servant; he who put the sweetness into them had prepared the taste of his servant to discern and enjoy it David makes no distinction between promises and precepts, doctrines and threatenings; they are all included in God's words, and all are precious in his esteem. Oh for a deep love to all that the Lord has revealed, whatever form it may take!

"Yea, sweeter than honey to my mouth!" When he did not only eat but also speak the word, by instructing others, he felt "an increased delight in it The sweetest of all temporal things falls short of the infinite delicious-ness of the eternal word: honey itself is outstripped in sweetness by the word of the Lord. When the Psalmist fed on it he found it sweet; but when he bore witness of it, it became sweeter still. How wise it will be on our part to keep the word on our palate by meditation and on our tongue by confession! It must be sweet to our taste when we think of it, or it will not be sweet to our mouth when we talk of it. We must taste in the study what we preach in the pulpit. We must first spiritually become men of taste, and then we shall have a true enjoyment in setting forth the beauty and sweetness of the truth of God.

104. Through thy precepts I get understanding: therefore I hate every false way.

"Through thy precepts I get understanding." God's direction is our instruction. Obedience to the divine will begets wisdom of mind and action. As God's way is always best, those who follow it are sure to be justified by the result. If the Lawgiver were foolish his law would be the same, and obedience to such a law would involve us in a thousand mistakes; but as the reverse is the case, we may count ourselves happy to have such a wise, prudent, and beneficial law to be the rule of our lives. We are wise if we obey, and we grow wise by obeying.

"Therefore I hate every false way." Because he had understanding, and because of the divine precepts, he detested sin and falsehood. Every sin is a falsehood: we commit sin because we believe a lie, and in the end the flattering evil turns a liar to us, and we find ourselves betrayed. True hearts are not indifferent about falsehood, they grow warm in indignation: as they love the truth, so they hate the lie. Saints have a universal horror of all that is untrue; they tolerate no falsehood or folly, they set their faces against all error of doctrine or wickedness of life. He who is a lover of one sin is in league with the whole army of sins; we must have neither truce nor parley with even one of these Amalekites, for the Lord hath war with them from generation to generation, and so must we. It is well to be a good hater. And what is that? A hater of no living being, but a hater of "every false way." The way of self-will, of self-righteousness, of self-seeking, of wordliness, of pride, of unbelief, of hypocrisy, of lustfulness—these are all false ways, and therefore not only to be shunned, but to be abhorred. This final verse of the strophe marks a great advance in character, and shows that the man of God is growing stronger, bolder, and happier than aforetime. He has been taught of the Lord, so that he discerns between the precious and the

vile, and while he loves the truth fervently he hates falsehood intensely. May all of us reach this state of discrimination and determination, so that we may greatly glorify God!

Exposition of Psalm 119:105-112

Exposition of Psalms 119:105-112 105. THY word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path.

106. I have sworn, and I will perform it, that I will keep thy righteous judgments.

107. I am afflicted very much: quicken me, O Lord, according unto thy word.

108. Accept, I beseech thee, the freewill offerings of my mouth, O Lord, and teach me thy judgments.

109. My soul is continually in my hand: yet do I not forget thy law.

110. The wicked have laid a snare for me: yet I erred not from thy precepts.

111. Thy testimonies have I taken as an heritage for ever: for they are the rejoicing of my heart.

112. I have inclined mine heart to perform thy statutes always, even unto the end.

105. Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path.

"Thy word is a lamp unto my feet." We are walkers through the city of this world, and we are often called to go out into its darkness; let us never venture there without the light-giving word, lest we slip with our feet. Each man should use the word of God personally, practically, and habitually, that he may see his way, and see what lies in it. When darkness settles down upon all around me, the word of the Lord, like a flaming torch, reveals my way. Having no fixed lamps in eastern towns, in old time each passenger carried a lantern with him, that he might not fall into the open sewer, or stumble over the heaps of ordure which defiled the road. This is a true picture of our path through this dark world: we should not know the way, or how to walk in it, if Scripture, like a blazing flambeau, did not reveal it. One of the most practical benefits of Holy Writ is guidance in the acts of daily life: it is not sent to astound us with its brilliance, but to guide us by its instruction. It is true the head needs illumination, but even more the feet need direction, else head and feet may both fall into a ditch. Happy is the man who personally appropriates God's word, and practically uses it as his comfort and counsellor,—a lamp to his feet. "And a light unto my path." It is a lamp by night, a light by day, and a delight at all times. David guided his own steps by it, and also saw the difficulties of his road by its beams. He who walks in darkness is sure, sooner or later, to stumble; while he who walks by the light of day, or by the lamp of night, stumbleth not, but keeps his uprightness. Ignorance is painful upon practical subjects; it breeds indecision and suspense, and these are uncomfortable: the word of God, by imparting heavenly knowledge, leads to decision, and when that is followed by determined resolution, as in this case, it brings with it great restfulness of heart. This verse converses with God in adoring and yet familiar tones. Have we not something of like tenor to address to our heavenly Father?

Note how much this verse is like the first verse of the first octave, and the first of the second and other octaves. The seconds also are often in unison.

106. I have sworn, and I will perform it, that I will keep thy righteous judgments.

Under the influence of the clear light of knowledge he had firmly made up his mind, and solemnly declared his resolve in the sight of God. Perhaps mistrusting his own fickle mind, he had pledged himself in sacred form to abide faithful to the determinations and decisions of his God. Whatever path might open before him, he was sworn to follow that only upon which the lamp of the word was shining. The Scriptures are God's judgments, or verdicts, upon great moral questions; these are all righteous, and hence righteous men should be resolved to keep them at all hazards, since it must always be right to do right. Experience shows that the less of covenanting and swearing men formally enter upon the better, and the genius of our Saviour's teaching is against all unnecessary pledging and swearing; and yet under the gospel we ought to feel ourselves as much bound to obey the word of the Lord as if we had taken an oath so to do. The bonds of love are not less sacred than the fetters of law. When a man has vowed, he must be careful to "perform it"; and when a man has not vowed in so many words to keep the Lord's judgments, yet is he equally bound to do so by obligations which exist apart from any promise on our part—obligations founded in the eternal fitness of things, and confirmed by the abounding goodness of the Lord our God. Will not every believer own that he is under bonds to the redeeming Lord to follow his example, and keep his words? Yes, the vows of the Lord are upon us, especially upon such as have made profession of discipleship, have been baptized into the thrice-holy name, have eaten of the consecrated memorials, and have spoken in the name of the Lord Jesus. We are enlisted, and sworn in, and are bound to be loyal soldiers all through the war. Thus, having taken the word into our hearts by a firm resolve to obey it, we have a lamp within our souls as well as in the Book, and our course will be light unto the end.

107. "I am afflicted very much: quicken me, O Lord, according unto thy word."

"I am afflicted very much." According to the last verse, he had been sworn in as a soldier of the Lord, and in this next verse he is called to suffer hardness in that capacity. Our service of the Lord does not screen us from trial, but rather secures it for us. The Psalmist was a consecrated man, and yet a chastened man; nor were his chastisements light; for it seemed as if the more he was obedient the more he was afflicted. He evidently felt the rod to be bruising him very grievously, and he pleads before the Lord the greatness of his affliction as a reason why he should be sustained under it by an increase of his inner life. He speaks not by way of murmuring, but by way of pleading; from the very much affliction he argues for very much quickening.

"Quicken me, O Lord, according unto thy word." This is the best remedy for tribulation; the soul is raised above the thought of present distress, and is filled with that holy joy which attends all vigorous spiritual life, and so the affliction grows light Jehovah alone can quicken: he has life in himself, and therefore can communicate it readily; he can give us life at any moment, yea, at this present instant; for it is of the nature of quickening to be quick in its operation. The Lord has promised, prepared, and provided this blessing of renewed life for all his waiting servants: it is a covenant blessing, and it is as obtainable as it is needful. Frequently the affliction is made the means of the quickening, even as the stirring of a fire promotes the heat of the flame. In their affliction some desire death; let us pray for life. Our forebodings under trial are often very gloomy; let us entreat the Lord to deal with us, not according to our fears, but according to his own word. David had but few promises to quote, and many of these had been recorded in his own psalms,

yet he pleads the word of the Lord; how much more should we do so, since to us so many holy men have spoken by the Spirit of the Lord in that wonderful library which is now our Bible! Seeing we have more promises, let us offer more prayers, and let us exhibit more of the quickening power of the Word.

108. "Accept, I beseech thee, the freewill offerings of my mouth, O Lord, and teach me thy judgments.

"Accept, I beseech thee, the freewill offerings of my mouth, O Lord." The living praise the living God, and therefore the quickened one presents his sacrifice. He offers prayer, praise, confession, and testimony: these, presented with his voice in the presence of an audience, were the tribute of his mouth unto Jehovah. He trembles lest these should be so ill uttered as to displease the Lord, and therefore he implores acceptance. He pleads that the homage of his mouth was cheerfully and spontaneously rendered: all his utterances were freewill offerings. There can be no value in extorted confessions: God's revenues are not derived from forced taxation, but from freewill donation. There can be no acceptance where there is no willingness; there is no work of free grace where there is no fruit of freewill. Acceptance is a favour to be sought from the Lord with all earnestness, for without it our offerings are worse than useless. What a wonder of grace that the Lord will accept anything of such unworthy ones as we are!

"And teach me thy judgments." When we render unto the Lord our best, we become all the more concerned to do better. When we know that the Lord has accepted us, we then desire to be further instructed, that we may be still more acceptable. After quickening we need teaching: life without light, or zeal without knowledge, would be but half a blessing. These repeated cries for teaching show the humility of the man of God, and also discover to us our own need of similar instruction. Our judgment needs educating till it knows, agrees with, and acts upon, the judgments of the Lord. Those judgments are not always so clear as to be seen at once; we need to be taught in them till we admire their wisdom and adore their goodness as soon as ever we perceive them.

109. My soul is continually in my hand: yet do I not forget thy law.

"My soul is continually in my hand." He lived in the midst of danger. He had to be always fighting for existence—hiding in caves, or contending in battles. This is a very uncomfortable and trying state of affairs, and men are apt to think any expedient justifiable by which they can end such a condition: but David did not turn aside to find safety in sin, for he says, "Yet do I not forget thy law." They say that all things are fair in love and war; but the holy man thought not so: while he carried his life in his hand, he also carried the law in his heart. No danger of body should make us endanger our souls by forgetting that which is right. Trouble makes many a man forget his duty, and it would have had the same effect upon the Psalmist if he had not obtained quickening (Psalms 119:107) and teaching (Psalms 119:108). In his memory of the Lord's law lay his safety; he was certainly not forgotten of his God, for his God was not forgotten of him. It is a special proof of grace when nothing can drive truth out of our thoughts, or holiness out of our lives. If we remember the law even when death stares us in the face, we may be well assured that the Lord is remembering us.

110. The wicked have laid a snare for me: yet I erred not from thy precepts.

"The wicked have laid a snare for me." Spiritual life is the scene of constant danger: the believer lives with his life in his hand, and meanwhile all seem plotting to take it from him, by cunning if they cannot by violence. We shall not find it an easy thing to live the life of the faithful. Wicked spirits and wicked men will leave no stone unturned for our destruction. When all other devices fail, and even hidden pits do not succeed, the wicked still persevere in their treacherous endeavours, and, becoming craftier still, they set snares for the victim of their hate. The smaller species of game are usually taken by this method, by gin, or trap, or net, or noose. Wicked men are quite indifferent as to the manner in which they can destroy the good man; they think no more of him than if he were a rabbit or a rat. Cunning and treachery are always the allies of malice, and everything like a generous or chivalrous feeling is unknown among the graceless, who treat the godly as if they were vermin to be exterminated. When a man knows that he is thus assailed, he is too apt to become timorous, and rush upon some hasty device for deliverance, not without sin in the endeavour; but David calmly kept his way, and was able to write, "Yet I erred not from thy precepts." He was not snared, for he kept his eyes open, and kept near his God. He was not entrapped and robbed, for he followed the King's highway of holiness, where God secures safety to every traveller. He did not err from the right, and he was not deterred from following it, because he referred to the Lord for guidance, and obtained it. If we err from the precepts, we part with the promises; if we get away from God's presence, we wander into the wilds where the fowlers freely spread their nets. From this verse let us learn to be on our guard, for we, too, have enemies both crafty and wicked. Hunters set their traps in the animals' usual runs, and our worst snares are laid in our own ways. By keeping to the ways of the Lord we shall escape the snares of our adversaries, for his ways are safe and free from treachery.

111. Thy testimonies have I taken as an heritage for ever: for they are the rejoicing of my heart.

"Thy testimonies have I taken as an heritage for ever." He chose them as his lot, his portion, his estate; and what is more, he laid hold upon them and made them so—taking them into possession and enjoyment. David's choice is our choice. If we might have our desire, we would desire to keep the commands of God perfectly. To know the doctrine, to enjoy the promise, to practise the command—be this a kingdom large enough for us. Here we have an inheritance which cannot fade and cannot be alienated; it is for ever, and ours for ever, if we have so taken it. Sometimes, like Israel at their first coming into Canaan, we have to take our heritage by hard fighting, and, if so, it is worthy of all our labour and suffering; but always it has to be taken by a decided choice of the heart and grip of the will. God's election must be our election. What God gives by grace we must take by faith.

"For they are the rejoicing of my heart." The gladness which had come to him through the word of the Lord had caused him to make an unalterable choice of it. All the parts of Scripture had been pleasing to David, and were so still, and therefore he stuck to them, and meant to stick to them for ever. That which rejoices the heart is sure to be chosen and treasured. It is not the head-knowledge but the heart-experience which brings the joy. In this verse, which is the seventh of its octave, we have reached the same sweetness as in the seventh of the last eight (Psalms 119:103). It is worthy of observation that in several of the adjoining sevenths delight is evident. How good a thing it is when experience ripens into joy, passing up through sorrow, prayer, conflict, hope, decision, and holy content into rejoicing! Joy fixes the spirit: when once a man's heart rejoices in the divine word, he greatly values it, and is therefore for ever united to it.

112. I have inclined mine heart to perform thy statutes alway, even unto the end.

He was active and energetic in ruling his own heart: not only could he say, "I am inclined," but, "I have inclined." He was not half inclined to virtue, but heartily inclined to it. His whole heart was bent on practical, persevering godliness. He was resolved to keep all the statutes of the Lord, with all his heart, throughout all his time, without erring or ending. He made it his end to keep the law unto the end, and that without end. He had by prayer, and meditation, and resolution made his whole being lean towards God's commands; or as we should say in other words—the grace of God had inclined him to incline his heart in a sanctified direction. Many are inclined to preach, but the Psalmist was inclined to practise; many are inclined to perform ceremonies, but he was inclined to perform statutes; many are inclined to obey occasionally, but David was inclined to obey alway; and, alas! many are inclined for temporary religion, but this godly man was so inclined that he felt bound to all eternity to perform the statutes of his Lord and King. Lord, send us such a heavenly inclination of heart as this: then shall we show that thou hast quickened and taught us. To this end create in us a clean heart, and daily renew a right spirit within us, for only so shall we incline in the right direction.

Many have declined who once seemed inclined to better things; may the Lord so rule our hearts that we may never lose our wholehearted inclination towards holy living!

Exposition of Psalm 119:113-120

Exposition of Psalms 119:113-120 113. I HATE vain thoughts: but thy law do I love.

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

115. Depart from me, ye evildoers: for I will keep the commandments of my God.

116. Uphold me according unto thy word, that I may live: and let me not be ashamed of my hope.

117. Hold thou me up, and I shall be safe: and I will have respect unto thy statutes continually.

118. Thou hast trodden down all them that err from thy statutes: for their deceit is falsehood.

119. Thou puttest away all the wicked of the earth like dross: therefore I love thy testimonies.

120. My flesh trembleth for fear of thee; and I am afraid of thy judgments. This octave, whose initial letter is Samech, or S., has been likened to Samson at his death, when he laid hold of the pillars of the house and pulled it down on the Philistines. Mark how he grips the pillars of divine power, with "Uphold me," and "Hold thou me up"; and see how the house falls down in judgment on the unholy! "Thou puttest away all the wicked of the earth like dross." This section carries the war into the enemy's country, and exhibits the believer as militant against falsehood and iniquity.

113. I hate vain thoughts: but thy law do I love. In this paragraph the Psalmist deals with thoughts and things and persons which are the opposite of God's holy thoughts and ways. He is evidently moved with great indignation against the powers of darkness and their allies; and his whole soul is stirred up to stand against them with a determined opposition. Just as he began the octave, Psalms 119:97, with "O how love I thy law!" so he begins here with a declaration of intense love; but he prefaces it with an equally fervent declaration of hatred against that which breaks the law. The opposite of the fixed and infallible testimony of God is the wavering, changing thought of men. David had an utter contempt and abhorrence for the vain opinions of man's conceited wisdom; all his reverence and regard went to the sure word of divine truth. In proportion to his love to the law was his hate of man's inventions. The word "vain" is very properly supplied by the translators; for the original word signifies "haltings between two opinions," and hence it includes sceptical doubts. The thoughts of men are vanity; but the thoughts of God are verity. We hear much in these days of "men of thought," "thoughtful preachers," and "modern thought": what is this but the old pride of the human heart? Vain man would be wise. The Psalmist did not glory in his thoughts; and that which was called "thought" in his day was a thing which he detested. When man thinks his best, his highest thoughts are as far below those of divine revelation as the earth is beneath the heavens.

Some thoughts are specially vain in the sense of vainglory, pride, conceit, and self-trust; others in the sense of bringing disappointment, such as fond ambition, unfounded hope, and forbidden confidence in man. Many thoughts are vain in the sense of emptiness and frivolity, such as the idle dreams and vacant romancings in which many indulge. Once more, many thoughts are vain in the

sense of being sinful, evil, and foolish. The Psalmist is not indifferent to evil thoughts as the careless are; but he looks upon them with a hate as true as was the love with which he clung to the pure thoughts of God. The last octave was practical, this is thoughtful. There the man of God attended to his feet, and here to his heart: the emotions of the soul are as important as the acts of the life, for they are the fountain and spring from which our actions proceed. When we love the law, it becomes a law of love, and we cleave to it with our whole heart.

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

"Thou art my hiding place and my shield." God was his shelter and shield. To his God he ran for refuge from vain thoughts; there he hid himself away from their tormenting intrusion, and in solemn silence of the soul he found God to be his place of sanctuary. When moving about the world, if he could not be alone with God as in a hiding-place, the man of God could have the Lord with him as his shield, and by this means he could ward off the poisoned arrows of evil suggestion. This is an experimental verse, and it testifies to that which the writer knew of his own personal knowledge: he could not fight with his own thoughts, nor escape from them, till he flew to his God, and then he found deliverance. Observe that he does not speak of God's word as being his double defence, but he ascribes his safeguard to God himself: "Thou art my hiding place and my shield." When we are beset by subtle spiritual assaults, such as those which arise out of vain thoughts, we shall do well to fly direct to the real presence of our Lord, and cast ourselves upon his power and love. The true God truly realized is the death of falsehood. Happy is he who can truly say to the triune God, "Thou art my hiding place"! He has beheld God under that glorious covenant aspect which ensures to the beholder the strongest consolation.

"I hope in thy word." As well he might, since he had tried and proved it. That which has been true in the past may be trusted for the future. The Psalmist looked for protection from all danger, and preservation from all temptation, to the Lord who had been the tower of his defence on former occasions. It is easy to exercise hope where we have experienced help. Sometimes, when gloomy thoughts afflict us, the only thing we can do is to hope; and, happily, the word of God always sets before us objects of hope, reasons for hope, and invitations to hope, in such abundance that it becomes the very sphere and support of hope, and thus timorous and tempting thoughts are overcome. Amid fret and worry a hope of heaven is an effectual quietus.

115. Depart from me, ye evildoers: for I will keep the commandments of my God.

"Depart from me, ye evildoers." Those who make a conscience of their thoughts are not likely to tolerate evil company. If we fly to God from vain thoughts, much more shall we avoid vain men. Kings are all too apt to be surrounded by a class of men who flatter them, and at the same time take liberty to break the laws of God: David purged his palace of such parasites; he would not harbour them beneath his roof. No doubt they would have brought upon him an ill name; for their doings would have been imputed to him, since the acts of courtiers are generally set down as acts of the court itself; therefore the King sent them packing, bag and baggage, saying,—"Depart from me." Herein he anticipated the sentence of the last great day, when the Son of David shall say, "Depart from me, ye workers of iniquity." We cannot thus send all evildoers out of our houses, but it may upon occasion be our bounden duty to do so. Right and reason require that we should not be pestered with incorrigible servants or discreditable lodgers. A house is all the better for being rid of liars, pilferers, lewd talkers, and slanderers. Where we can have our own choice of company,

we are bound at all hazards to keep ourselves clear of doubtful associates. As soon as we have reason to believe that their character is vicious, it will be better for us to have their room than their company. Evildoers make evil counsellors, and therefore we must not sit with them. Those who say unto God, "Depart from us," ought to hear the immediate echo of their words from the mouths of God's children, who should say to them, "Depart from us." We cannot eat bread with traitors, lest we be ourselves attainted of high treason.

"For I will keep the commandments of my God." Since he found it hard to keep the Lord's commandments in the company of the ungodly, he gave them their marching orders. He must keep the commandments, but he did not need to keep the company of evildoers. What a beautiful title for the Lord this verse contains! "My God." The word God only occurs in this one place throughout this lengthened psalm, and then it is attended by the personal word "my"—"my God."

"My God! how charming is the sound!

How pleasant to repeat!

Well may that heart with pleasure bound, Where God hath fix'd his seat."

Because Jehovah is our God, therefore we resolve to obey him, and to chase out of our sight those who would hinder us in his service. It is a grand thing for the mind to have come to a decision, and to be steadfastly fixed in the holy determination,—"I will keep the commandments of my God." God's law is our delight when the God of the law is our God.

116. Uphold me according unto thy word, that I may live: and let me not be ashamed of my hope.

"Uphold me according unto thy word, that I may live." It was so necessary that the Lord should hold up his servant, that he could not even live without it. Our soul would die, and every grace of spiritual life would die also, if the Lord withdrew his upholding hand. It is a sweet comfort that this great necessity of upholding is provided for in the Word, and we have not to ask for it as for an uncovenanted mercy, but simply to plead for the fulfilment of a promise, saying, "Uphold me according to thy word." He who has given us eternal life hath in that gift secured to us all that is essential thereto; and as gracious upholding is one of the necessary things, we may be sure that we shall have it. Note, that when David had chased away the evildoers, he did not therefore feel safe when alone. He knew that he needed to be preserved from his own weakness as well as from other men's evil examples, and so he prayed for upholding grace.

"And let me not be ashamed of my hope." In Psalms 119:114 he had spoken of his hope as founded on the word of the Lord, and now he begs for the fulfilment of the promise, that his hope may be justified in the sight of men. A man will soon be ashamed of his hope if it is not based upon a sure foundation: but this can never happen in our case, since we trust a faithful God. We may be ashamed of our thoughts, and our words, and our deeds, for they spring from ourselves; but we never shall be ashamed of our hope for that springs from the Lord. We may well be ashamed of our doubt, but we need never be ashamed of our hope. Such is the frailty of our nature that, unless we are continually upheld by grace, we shall fall so foully as to be ashamed of ourselves, and ashamed of all those glorious hopes which are now the crown and glory of our life. This may be the case even in solitude: when evildoers are gone, we may yet fall victims to our foolish fears. The man of God had uttered firm resolves, but he could not trust in his own resolves, however

solemnly made: hence these prayers. It is not wrong to make resolutions, but it will be useless to do so unless we salt them well with believing cries to God. David meant to keep the law of the Lord, but he first needed the Lord of the law to keep him.

117. "Hold thou me up, and I shall be safe: and I will have respect unto thy statutes continually."

"Hold thou me up": as a nurse holds up a little child. "And I shall be safe," and not else; for unless thou hold me up I shall be falling about like an infant that is weak upon its legs. We have been saved by past grace, but still we are not safe unless we receive present grace. Our version first translates the word "uphold," and then "hold up"; and truly we need this blessing in every shape in which it can come, for in all manner of ways our adversaries seek to cast us down. To be safe is a happy condition; there is only one way to it, and that is by divine upholding: thank God, that way is open to the least among us.

"Hold thou me up" may also be a plea for elevation of mind. "Nearer, my God, to thee," is the same prayer. We would be held up above self and sin, and all else that grovels; for then are we surely safe.

"And I will have respect unto thy statutes continually." Thus, being held up, we obey; and in obeying we are safe. No man will outwardly keep the Lord's statutes for long together unless he has an inward "respect" for them, and this will never be unless the hand of the Lord perpetually upholds the heart in holy love. Perseverance to the end, or continual obedience, comes only through the divine power; we start aside as a deceitful bow unless we are kept right by him who first gave us grace. Happy is the man who realizes this verse in his life: upheld through his whole life in a course of unswerving integrity, he becomes a "safe man," a trusted man. Such a safe man manifests a sacred delicacy of conscience which is unknown to others. He feels a tender "respect" for the statutes of the Lord, which keeps him clear of those inconsistencies and conformities to the world which are so common among others. Hence he becomes a pillar in the house of the Lord. Alas! we know some professors who are not upright, and therefore they lean to sin till they fall over; even when they are restored and set up again, they are never safe or reliable, neither have they that sweet purity of soul which is the charm of those who have been kept from falling into the mire.

118. Thou hast trodden down all them that err from thy statutes: for their deceit is falsehood.

"Thou hast trodden down all them that err from thy statutes." There is no holding up for them; they are thrown down and then trodden down, for they choose to go down into the wandering ways of sin. Sooner or later, God will set his foot on those who turn their foot from his commands: it has always been so, and it always will be so to the end. If the salt has lost its savour, what is it fit for but to be trodden under foot? God puts away the wicked like dross, which is only fit to be cast out as road-metal to be trodden down.

"For their deceit is falsehood." They call it far-seeing policy, but it is absolute falsehood, and it shall be treated as such. Ordinary men call it clever diplomacy, but the man of God calls a spade a spade, and declares it to be falsehood, and nothing less; for he knows that it is so in the sight of God. Men who err from the right road invent pretty excuses with which to deceive themselves and others, and so attempt to quiet their consciences and maintain their credit; but their mask of falsehood is too transparent. God treads down falsehoods; they are only fit to be spurned by his

feet, and crushed into the dust. How horrified will those be who have spent all their lives in contriving a confectionery religion, when they see it all trodden upon by God as a sham which he cannot endure!

119. Thou puttest away all the wicked of the earth like dross: therefore I love thy testimonies.

"Thou puttest away all the wicked of the earth like dross." He does not trifle with them, nor handle them with kid gloves. No, he judges them to be the scum of the earth, and he treats them accordingly by putting them away. He puts them away from his church, away from their honours, away from the earth, and at last away from himself. "Depart," saith he, "ye cursed." If even a good man feels forced to put away the evildoers from him, much more must the thrice holy God put away the wicked. They looked like precious metal, they were intimately mixed up with it, they were laid up in the same heap; but the Lord is a refiner, and every day he removes some of the wicked from among his people, either by making a shameful discovery of their hypocrisy or by consuming them from off the earth. They are put away as dross, never to be recalled. As the metal is the better for losing its alloy, so is the church the better for having the wicked removed. These wicked ones are "of the earth"—"the wicked of the earth," and they have no right to be with those who are "not of the world"; the Lord perceives them to be out of place and injurious, and therefore he puts them away, all of them, leaving none of them to deteriorate his people. The process will one day be perfected; no dross will be spared, no gold will be left impure. Where shall we be when that great work is finished? Shall we be treasured with the gold, or trodden down with the dross?

"Therefore I love thy testimonies." Even the severities of the Lord excite the love of his people. If he allowed men to sin with impunity, he would not be so fully the object of our loving admiration. He is glorious in holiness because he thus rids his kingdom of rebels, and his temple of them that defile it. In these evil days, when God's punishment of sinners has become the butt of a proud scepticism, we may regard it as a mark of the true man of God that he loves the Lord none the less, but a great deal the more, because of his condign judgment of the ungodly. We greatly value those passages of Scripture which are most terrible in their denunciation of sin and sinners. We love those testimonies which foretell the overthrow of evil and the destruction of the enemies of God. A God more lenient would be a God less loving and less loved. Holy hearts love best a perfectly righteous God.

120. My flesh trembleth for fear of thee; and I am afraid of thy judgments.

"My flesh trembleth for fear of thee." He did not exult over the punishment of others, but he trembled on his own account. Such was his awe in the presence of the Judge of all the earth, whose judgment he had just now been considering, that he did exceedingly fear and quake. Familiarity with God breeds a holy awe of him. Even the grosser part of David's being, his flesh, felt a solemn dread at the thought of offending One so good and great, who would so effectually sever the wicked from among the just. Alas, poor flesh, this is the highest thing to which thou canst attain! Yet this is far better than thy pride when thou dost exalt thyself against thy Maker.

"And I am afraid of thy judgments." God's words of judgment are solemn, and his deeds of judgment are terrible; they may well make us afraid. At the thought of the Judge of all—his piercing eye, his books of record, his day of assize, his awful sentence, and the execution of his justice—we may well cry for cleansed thoughts, and hearts, and ways, lest his judgments should

light on us. When we see the great Refiner separating the precious from the vile, we may well feel a godly fear, lest we should be put away by him, and left to be trodden under his feet. Even his judgments, as we find them written in the word, fill us with trembling; and this becomes to us an evidence of grace. But what will the judgments themselves be when carried into effect? Oh the trembling and the fear which will be the eternal portion of those who run upon the bosses of Jehovah's buckler and defy his wrath!

Love in the previous verse is quite consistent with fear in this verse: the fear which hath torment is cast out, but not the filial fear which leads to reverence and obedience.

Exposition of Psalm 119:121-128

Exposition of Psalms 119:121-128 121. I HAVE done judgment and justice: leave me not to mine oppressors.

122. Be surety for thy servant for good: let not the proud oppress me.

123. Mine eyes fail for thy salvation, and for the word of thy righteousness.

124. Deal with thy servant according unto thy mercy, and teach me thy statutes.

125. I am thy servant; give me understanding, that I may know thy testimonies.

126. It is time for thee, Lord, to work: for they have made void thy law.

127. Therefore I love thy commandments above gold; yea, above fine gold.

128. Therefore I esteem all thy precepts concerning all things to be right; and I hate every false way. In this octave the Psalmist first entreats the Lord to interfere on his behalf: he asks for judgment from the great King, even as he himself had dealt out justice to his people. He then declares his unfeigned and unqualified content with all the Lord's commands and precepts, and begs him to defend his own law. He writes from the stand-point of his official experience. In our public as well as our private position, the Word is precious.

121. I have done judgment and justice: leave me not to mine oppressors.

"I have done judgment and justice." This was a great thing for an Eastern ruler to say at any time; for these despots mostly cared more for gain than justice. Some of them altogether neglected their duty, and would not even do judgment at all, preferring their pleasures to their duties; and many more of them sold their judgments to the highest bidders by taking bribes, or regarding the persons of men. Some rulers gave neither judgment nor justice; others gave judgment without justice; but David gave judgment and justice, and saw that his sentences were carried out. He could claim before the Lord that he had dealt out even-handed justice, and was doing so still. On this fact he founded a plea with which he backed the prayer—"Leave me not to mine oppressors." He who, as far as his power goes, has been doing right, may hope to be delivered from his oppressors when attempts are made by them to do him wrong. If I will not oppress others, I may hopefully pray that others may not be permitted to oppress me. A course of upright conduct is one which gives us boldness in appealing to the Great Judge for deliverance from the injustice of wicked men. Nor is this kind of pleading to be censured as self-righteous; it is most fit and acceptable. When we are dealing with God as to our shortcomings, we use a very different tone from that with which we face the censures of our fellowmen. When untruthful accusers are in the question, and we are guiltless towards them, we are justified in pleading our innocence. Moral integrity is a great helper of spiritual comfort. If we are right in our conduct, we may be sure that the Lord will not leave us at all, and certainly will not leave us to our enemies.

122. Be surety for thy servant for good: let not the proud oppress me.

"Be surety for thy servant for good." This was the cry of Job and of Hezekiah, and it is the cry of every soul which believes in the great Intercessor and Daysman. Answer for me. Do not leave thy poor servant to die by the hand of his enemy and thine. Take up my interests and weave them with thine own, and stand for me. As my Master, undertake thy servant's cause, and represent me before the faces of haughty men till they see what an august ally I have in the Lord my God. Our greatest salvation comes from the divine suretyship. The Son of God as our Surety has smarted for us, and thereby he has brought good to us, and saved us from our proud oppressor, the arch-enemy of souls. In this verse we have not the law mentioned under any of its many names, and this is the only instance in the whole Psalm in which a verse omits mention of the Word of the Lord. Yet this is no exception to the spirit of the rule; for here we find mention of our Surety, who is the fulfilment of the law. Where the law fails we have Christ, the surety of a better covenant. This suretyship is always for good, but how much of good no tongue can tell.

"Let not the proud oppress me." Thine interposition will answer the purpose of my rescue: when the proud see that thou art my advocate, they will hide their heads. We should have been crushed beneath our proud adversary the devil if our Lord Jesus had not stood between us and the accuser, and become a surety for us. It is by his suretyship that we escape like a bird from the snare of the fowler. What a blessing to be able to leave our matters in our Surety's hands, knowing that all will be well, since he has an answer for every accuser, a rebuke for every reviler!

Good men dread oppression, for it makes even a wise man mad, and they send up their cries to heaven for deliverance; nor shall they cry in vain, for the Lord will undertake the cause of his servants, and fight their battles against the proud. The word "servant" is wisely used as a plea for favour for himself, and the word "proud" as an argument against his enemies. It seems to be inevitable that proud men should become oppressors, and that they should take most delight in oppressing the true servants of God. Their oppressions will soon be put down, because they are oppressions, because the workers of them are proud, and because the objects of them are the Lord's servants.

123. Mine eyes fail for thy salvation, and for the word of thy righteousness.

"Mine eyes fail for thy salvation." He wept, waited, and watched for God's saving hand, and these exercises tried the eyes of his faith till they were almost ready to give out. He looked to God alone, he looked eagerly, he looked long, he looked till his eyes ached. The mercy is, that if our eyes fail, God does not fail, nor do his eyes fail. Eyes are tender things, and so are our faith, hope and expectancy: the Lord will not try them above what they are able to bear. "And for the word of thy righteousness"; a word that would silence the unrighteous words of his oppressors. His eyes as well as his ears waited for the Lord's word: he looked to see the divine word come forth as a fiat for his deliverance. He was "waiting for the verdict"—the verdict of righteousness itself. How happy are we if we have righteousness on our side! for then that which is the sinners' terror is our hope, that which the proud dread is our expectation and desire. David left his reputation entirely in the Lord's hand, and was eager to be cleared by the word of the Judge rather than by any defence of his own. He knew that he had done right, and, therefore, instead of avoiding the supreme court, he begged for the sentence which he knew would work out his deliverance. He even watched with eager eyes for the judgment and the deliverance, the word of righteousness from God which meant salvation to himself.

124. Deal with thy servant according unto thy mercy, and teach me thy statutes.

"Deal with thy servant according unto thy mercy." Here he recollects himself: although before men he was so clear that he could challenge the word of righteousness, yet before the Lord, as his servant, he felt that he must appeal to mercy. We feel safest here. Our heart has more rest in the cry, "God be merciful to me," than in appealing to justice. It is well to be able to say, "I have done judgment and justice," and then to add, in all lowliness, yet "deal with thy servant according unto thy mercy." The title of servant covers a plea; a master should clear the character of his servant if he be falsely accused, and rescue him from those who would oppress him; and, moreover, the master should show mercy to a servant, even if he deal severely with a stranger. The Lord condescendingly deals, or has communications with, his servants, not spurning them, but communing with them; and this he does in a tender and merciful way, for in any other form of dealing we should be crushed into the dust. "And teach me thy statutes." This will be one way of dealing with us in mercy. We may expect a master to teach his own servant the meaning of his own orders. Yet since our ignorance frequently arises from our sinful stupidity, it is great mercy on God's part that he condescends to instruct us in his commands. For our ruler to become our teacher is an act of great grace, for which we cannot be too grateful. Among our mercies this is one of the choicest.

125. I am thy servant; give me understanding, that I may know thy testimonies.

"I am thy servant." This is the third time he has repeated this title in this one section: he is evidently fond of the name, and conceives it to be a very effective plea. We who rejoice that we are sons of God are by no means the less delighted to be his servants. Did not the firstborn Son assume the servant's form and fulfil the servant's labour to the full? What higher honour can the younger brethren desire than to be made like the Heir of all things?

"Give me understandings that I may know thy testimonies." In the previous verse he sought teaching; but here he goes much further, and craves for understanding. Usually, if the instructor supplies the teaching, the pupil finds the understanding; but in our case we are far more dependent, and must beg for understanding as well as teaching: this the ordinary teacher cannot give, and we are thrice happy that our Divine Tutor can furnish us with it. We are to confess ourselves fools, and then our Lord will make us wise, as well as give us knowledge. The best understanding is that which enables us to render perfect obedience and to exhibit intelligent faith, and it is this which David desires—"understanding, that I may know thy testimonies." Some would rather not know these things; they prefer to be at ease in the dark rather than possess the light which leads to repentance and diligence. The servant of God longs to know in an understanding manner all that the Lord reveals of man and to man; he wishes to be so instructed that he may apprehend and comprehend that which is taught him. A servant should not be ignorant concerning his master, or his master's business; he should study the mind, will, purpose, and aim of him whom he serves, for so only can he fulfil his service; and as no man knows these things so well as his master himself, he should often go to him for instructions, lest his very zeal should only serve to make him the greater blunderer.

It is remarkable that the Psalmist does not pray for understanding through acquiring knowledge, but begs of the Lord first that he may have the gracious gift of understanding, and then may obtain the desired instruction. All that we know before we have understanding is apt to spoil us and breed

vanity in us; but if there be first an understanding heart, then the stores of knowledge enrich the soul, and bring neither sin nor sorrow therewith. Moreover, this gift of understanding acts also in the form of discernment, and thus the good man is preserved from hoarding up that which is false and dangerous: he knows what are and what are not the testimonies of the Lord.

126. "It is time for thee, Lord, to work: for they have made void thy law."

David was a servant, and therefore it was always his time to work: but being oppressed by a sight of man's ungodly behaviour, he feels that his Master's hand is wanted, and therefore he appeals to him to work against the working of evil. Men make void the law of God by denying it to be his law, by promulgating commands and doctrines in opposition to it, by setting up tradition in its place, or by utterly disregarding and scorning the authority of the lawgiver. Then sin becomes fashionable, and a holy walk is regarded as a contemptible puritanism; vice is styled pleasure, and vanity bears the bell. Then the saints sigh for the presence and power of their God. Oh for an hour of the King upon the throne with the rod of iron in his hand! Oh for another Pentecost with all its wonders, to reveal the energy of God to gainsayers, and make them see that there is a God in Israel! Man's extremity, whether of need or sin, is God's opportunity. When the earth was without form and void, the Spirit came and moved upon the face of the waters; should he not come when society is returning to a like chaos? When Israel in Egypt were reduced to the lowest point, and it seemed that the covenant would be void, then Moses appeared and wrought mighty miracles; so, too, when the church of God is trampled down, and her message is derided, we may expect to see the hand of the Lord stretched out for the revival of religion, the defence of the truth, and the glorifying of the divine name. The Lord can work either by judgments which hurl down the ramparts of the foe, or by revivals which build up the walls of his own Jerusalem. How heartily may we pray the Lord to raise up new evangelists, to quicken those we already have, to set his whole church on fire, and to bring the world to his feet! God's work is ever honourable and glorious; as for our work, it is as nothing apart from him.

127. Therefore I love thy commandments above gold; yea, above fine gold. As it was God's time to work, so it was David's time to love. So far from being swayed by the example of evil men, so as to join them in slighting the Scriptures, he was the rather led into a more vehement love of those divine revelations. He loved not only the doctrines, but the commandments. As he saw the commandments slighted by the ungodly, his heart was in sympathy with God, and he felt a burning affection for his holy precepts. It is the mark of a true believer that he does not depend upon others for his religion, but drinks water out of his own well, which springs up even when the cisterns of earth are all dried. Amid a general depreciation of the law, our holy poet felt his own esteem of it rising so high that gold and silver sank in comparison. Wealth brings with it so many conveniences that men naturally esteem it, and gold as the symbol of it is much set by; and yet, in the judgment of the wise, God's laws are more enriching, and bring with them more comfort, than all the choicest treasures. The Psalmist could not boast that he always kept the commands; but he could declare that he loved them; he was perfect in heart, and would fain have been perfect in life. He judged God's holy commands to be better than the best earthly thing—gold; yea, better than the best sort of the best earthly thing—fine gold; and this esteem was confirmed and forced into expression by those very oppositions of the world which drive hypocrites to forsake the Lord and his ways. A miser watches his treasure all the more eagerly when he hears that there are thieves abroad who are in league to deprive him of it. The more men hate the eternal verities, the more do we prize

them. We can truly say—

"The dearer, for their rage, Thy words I love and own— A wealthier heritage Than gold and precious stone."

128. Therefore I esteem all thy precepts concerning all things to be right; and I hate every false way.

"Therefore I esteem all thy precepts concerning all things to be right." Because the ungodly found fault with the precepts of God, therefore David was all the more sure of their being right. The censure of the wicked is a certificate of merit; that which they sanction we may justly suspect, but that which they abominate we may ardently admire. The good man's delight in God's law is unreserved, he believes in all God's precepts concerning all things. We state our faith all the more broadly in proportion to the opposition of the foe. To carping criticism we oppose a fearless faith. When confidence in God is counted vile, we purpose to be viler still.

"And I hate every false way." Love to truth begat hatred to falsehood. He that prizes a robe abhors the moth which would devour it. This godly man was not indifferent to anything in the moral and spiritual world; but that which he did not love he hated. He was no chip in the porridge without flavour; he was a good lover or a good hater, but he was never a waverer. He knew what he felt, and he expressed it plainly. He was no Gallio, caring for none of these things. His detestation was as unreserved as his affection; he had not a good word for any practice which would not bear the light of truth. The fact that such large multitudes follow the broad road had no influence upon this holy man, except to make him more determined to avoid every form of error and sin. May the Holy Spirit so rule in our hearts that our affections may be in the same decided condition towards the precepts of the word! May we take our place on the side of God and righteousness, and never bear the sword in vain! We would not be pugnacious, but we dare not be sinfully indifferent. All sin we must hate; for any one of the whole tribe will be our ruin if it be indulged. To arms! To arms! ye soldiers of the cross.

Exposition of Psalm 119:129-136

Exposition of Psalms 119:129-136 129. THY testimonies are wonderful: therefore doth my soul keep them.

130. The entrance of thy words giveth light; it giveth understanding unto the simple 131. I opened my mouth, and panted: for I longed for thy commandments.

132. Look thou upon me, and be merciful unto me, as thou usest to do unto those that love thy name.

133. Order my steps in thy word: and let not any iniquity have dominion over me.

134. Deliver me from the oppression of man: so will I keep thy precepts.

135. Make thy face to shine upon thy servant; and teach me thy statutes.

136. Rivers of waters run down mine eyes, because they keep not thy law.

129. Thy testimonies are wonderful: therefore doth my soul keep them.

All the verses of this section begin with the seventeenth letter of the Hebrew alphabet; but each verse with a different word. This seventeenth letter is the letter P. The section is precious, practical, profitable, powerful; peculiarly so. Let us pray for a blessing upon the reading of it "Thy testimonies are wonderful." Full of wonderful revelations, commands, and promises. Wonderful in their nature, as being free from all error, and bearing within themselves overwhelming self-evidence of their truth; wonderful in their effects, as instructing, elevating, strengthening, and comforting the soul. Jesus the eternal Word is called Wonderful, and all the uttered words of God are wonderful in their degree. Those who know them best wonder at them most. It is wonderful that God should have borne testimony at all to sinful men, and more wonderful still that his testimony should be of so heavenly a character, so clear, so full, so gracious, so mighty.

"Therefore doth my soul keep them." Their wonderful character so impressed itself upon his mind that he kept them in his memory: their wonderful excellence so charmed his heart that he kept them in his life. Some men wonder at the words of God, and use them for their speculation; but David was always practical, and therefore the more he wondered the more he obeyed. Note that his religion was soul work; not with head and hand alone did he keep the testimonies; but his soul, his truest and most real self, held fast to them. The Psalmist was so charmed with the revealed will of God that he felt bound to exhibit its power in his daily life. His wondering and pondering produced reverential obedience.

130. The entrance of thy words giveth light; it giveth understanding unto the simple.

"The entrance of thy words giveth light." No sooner do they gain admission into the soul than they enlighten it: what light may be expected from their prolonged indwelling! Their very entrance floods the mind with instruction, for they are so full, so clear; what brightness must their abiding bring! On

the other hand, there must be such an "entrance," or there will be no illumination. The mere hearing of the word with the external ear is of small value by itself; but when the words of God enter into the chambers of the heart, then light is scattered on all sides. This is the work of God: he alone can give entrance to his word. We knock at the door in vain till grace opens it. The word finds no entrance into some minds because they are blocked up with self-conceit, or prejudice, or indifference; but where due attention is given, divine illumination must surely follow upon a knowledge of the mind of God. O Lord, make a clear entrance into my soul! Grant that thy words, like the beams of the sun, may enter through the window of my understanding, and dispel the darkness of my mind!

"It giveth understanding Unto the simple." The sincere and candid are the true disciples of the word. To such it gives not only knowledge, but understanding. These simple-hearted ones are frequently despised, and their simplicity has another meaning infused into it, so as to be made the theme of ridicule; but what matters it? Those whom the world dubs as fools are among the truly wise if they are taught of God. What a divine power rests in the word of God, since it not only bestows light, but even gives that mental eye by which the light is received—"It giveth understanding"! Hence the value of the words of God to the simple, who cannot receive mysterious truth unless their minds are aided to see it and prepared to grasp it.

131. I opened my mouth, and panted: for I longed for thy commandments.

"I opened my mouth, and panted." An enlarged desire is one of the first fruits of an understanding given us of the Lord. So animated was the Psalmist's desire, that he looked into the animal world to find a picture of it. Men restrain their expressions; but in the animal world all is natural and therefore truthful and forceful; and therefore, being filled with an intense longing, holy David was not ashamed to describe it by a most expressive, natural, and yet singular symbol. Like a stag that has been hunted in the chase, and is hard pressed, and therefore pants for breath, so did the Psalmist pant for the entrance of God's word into his soul. Nothing else could content him. All that the world could yield him left him still panting with open mouth. His soul panted for God, for the living God, and for grace to walk with him in the way of holiness.

"For I longed for thy commandments." Longed to know them, longed to obey them, longed to be conformed to their spirit, longed to teach them to others. He was a servant of God, and his industrious mind longed to receive orders; he was a learner in the school of grace, and his eager spirit longed to be taught of the Lord. Oh for more of this eager hungering, thirsting, pining, panting!

132. Look thou upon me, and be merciful unto me, as thou usest to do unto those that love thy name.

"Look thou upon me." A godly man cannot long be without prayer. During the previous verses he had been expressing his love to God's word, but here he is upon his knees again. This prayer is specially short, but exceedingly sententious: "Look thou upon me." While he stood with open mouth panting for the commandments, he besought the Lord to look upon him, and let his condition and his unexpressed longings plead for him. He desires to be known of God, and daily observed by him. He wishes also to be favoured with the divine smile which is included in the word "look." If a look from us to God has saving efficacy in it, what may we not expect by means of a

look from God to us?

"And be merciful unto me." Christ's look at Peter was a look of mercy, and all the looks of the heavenly Father are of the same kind. If he looked in stern justice, his eyes would not endure us; but looking in mercy, he spares and blesses us. If God looks and sees us panting, he will not fail to be merciful to us.

"As thou usest to do unto those that love thy name." Look on me as thou lookest on those who love thee; be merciful to me as thou art accustomed to be towards those who truly serve thee. There is a use and wont which God observes towards them that love him, and David craved that he might experience it. He would not have the Lord deal either better or worse with him than he was accustomed to deal with his saints—worse would not save him, better could not be. In effect he prays, "I am thy servant; treat me as thou treatest thy servants. I am thy child; deal with me as with the rest of thy children." Especially is it clear from the context that he desired such an entering in of the word, and such a clear understanding of it, as God usually gives to his own, according to the promise, "All thy children shall be taught of the Lord."

Reader, do you love the name of the Lord? Is his character most honourable in your sight? most dear to your heart? This is a sure mark of grace; for no soul ever loved the Lord except as the result of love received from the Lord himself.

133. Order my steps in thy word: and let not any iniquity have dominion over me.

"Order my steps in thy word." This is one of the Lord's customary mercies to his chosen,—"He keepeth the feet of his saints." Thus he useth to do unto those who love his name. By his grace he enables us to put our feet step by step in the very place which his word ordains. This prayer seeks a very choice favour, namely, that every distinct act, every step, may be arranged and governed by the will of God. This does not stop short of perfect holiness, neither will the believer's desires be satisfied with anything beneath that blessed consummation.

"And let not any iniquity have dominion over me." This is the negative side of the blessing. We ask to do all that is right, and to fall under the power of nothing that is wrong. God is our sovereign, and we would have every thought in subjection to his sway. Believers have no darling sins to which they would be willing to bow. They pant for perfect deliverance from the dominion of evil, and being conscious that they cannot obtain it of themselves, they cry unto God for it.

Taken in connection with the former clause, we learn, that to avoid all sin we must observe all duty. Only by actual obedience can we be preserved from falling into evil. Omissions lead to commissions: only an ordered life can save us from the disorder of iniquity.

134. Deliver me from the oppression of man: so will I keep thy precepts.

"Deliver me from the oppression of man." David had tasted all the bitterness of this great evil. It had made him an exile from his country, and banished him from the sanctuary of the Lord: therefore he pleads to be saved from it. It is said that oppression makes a wise man mad, and no doubt it has made many a righteous man sinful. Oppression is in itself wicked, and it drives men to wickedness. We little know how much of our virtue is due to our liberty; if we had been in bonds under haughty tyrants we might have yielded to them, and instead of being confessors we might now have been apostates. He who taught us to pray, "Lead us not into temptation," will sanction

this prayer to be delivered from oppression, since it is of much the same tenor. To be oppressed is to be tempted. Lord, preserve us from it.

"So will I keep thy precepts." When the stress of oppression was taken off he would go his own way, and that way would be the way of the Lord. Although we ought not to yield to the threatenings of men, yet many do so; the wife is in many instances compelled by the oppression of her husband to act against her conscience: children and servants, families and societies, and even whole nations, have been brought into the same difficulty. Sins committed through intimidation will be largely laid at the oppressor's door; and it usually pleases God ere long to overthrow those powers and persons which compel men to do evil. The worst of it is, that some people, when the pressure is taken off from them, follow after unrighteousness of their own accord. These give evidence of being sinners in grain. As for the righteous, it happens to them as it did to the apostles of old, "Being let go, they went to their own company." When saints are freed from tyrants, they joyfully pay homage to their Lord and King.

135. Make thy face to shine upon thy servant; and teach me thy statutes.

"Make thy face to shine upon thy servant." Oppressors frown, but do thou smile. They darken my life, but do thou shine upon me, and all will be bright. The Psalmist again declares that he is God's servant; and therefore he values his Master's smile. He seeks for no favour from others, but only from his own Lord and Master.

"And teach me thy statutes." He seeks holy education as the chief token of divine love. This is the favour which he considers to be the shining of the face of God upon him. If the Lord will be exceeding gracious, and make him his favourite, he will ask no higher blessing than still to be taught the royal statutes. See how the good man craves after holiness! this is the choicest of all gems in his esteem. As we say among men that a good education is a great fortune, so to be taught of the Lord is a gift of special grace. The most favoured believer needs teaching; even when he walks in the light of God's countenance, he has still to be taught the divine statutes, or he will transgress.

136. Rivers of waters run down mine eyes, because they keep not thy law.

He wept in sympathy with God to see the holy law despised and broken. He wept in pity for men who were thus drawing down upon themselves the fiery wrath of God. His grief was such that he could scarcely give it vent; his tears were not mere drops of sorrow, but rivers of waters, torrents of woe. In this sacred grief the man of God became like the Lord Jesus, who beheld the city, and wept over it; and like unto Jehovah himself, who hath no pleasure in the death of him that dieth, but that he turn unto him and live. The experience of this verse indicates a great advance upon anything we have read before in this divine song: the psalm and the Psalmist are both growing. That man is a ripe believer who sorrows because of the sins of others. Mourners in Zion are among the chief of the saints. In verse 120 his flesh trembled at the presence of God, but here it seems to melt and flow away in floods of tears. "Teach me thy statutes" is followed by an expression of great tenderness of heart. None are so affected by heavenly things as those who are much in the study of the word, and are thereby taught the truth and essence of things. Carnal men are afraid of brute force, and weep over losses and crosses; but spiritual men feel a holy fear of the Lord himself, and most of all lament when they see dishonour cast upon his holy name.

"Lord, let me weep for nought but sin, And after none but thee, And then I would, O that I might! A constant weeper be."

Exposition of Psalm 119:137-144

Exposition of Psalms 119:137-144 137. RIGHTEOUS art thou, O Lord, and upright are thy judgments.

138. Thy testimonies that thou hast commanded are righteous and very faithful.

139. My zeal hath consumed me, because mine enemies have forgotten thy words.

140. Thy word is very pure: therefore thy servant loveth it, 141. I am small and despised: yet do not I forget thy precepts.

142. Thy righteousness is an everlasting righteousness, and thy law is the truth.

143. Trouble and anguish have taken hold on me: yet thy commandments are my delights.

144. The righteousness of thy testimonies is everlasting; give me understanding, and I shall live. This passage deals with the perfect righteousness of Jehovah and his word, and expresses the struggles of a holy soul in reference to that righteousness. The initial letter with which every verse commences has a sound which reminded the Hebrew reader of the word for righteousness. The keynote of this section is righteousness. Oh, for grace to delight ourselves in righteousness!

137. "Righteous art thou, O Lord, and upright are thy judgments."

"Righteous art thou, O Lord." The Psalmist has not often used the name of Jehovah in this vast composition. The whole psalm shows him to have been a deeply religious man, thoroughly familiar with the things of God; and such persons never use the holy name of God carelessly, nor do they even use it at all frequently in comparison with the thoughtless and the ungodly. Familiarity begets reverence in this case. Here he uses the sacred name in worship. He praises God by ascribing to him perfect righteousness. God is always right, and he is always actively right, that is, righteous. This quality is bound up in our very idea of God. We cannot imagine an unrighteous God. Let us praise him by ascribing righteousness to him, even when his ways to us are painful to flesh and blood.

"And upright are thy judgments." Here he extols God's word, or recorded judgments, as being right, even as their Author is righteous. That which comes from the righteous God is itself righteous. Jehovah both saith and doth that which is right, and that alone. This is a great stay to the soul in time of trouble. When we are sorely afflicted, and cannot see the reason for the dispensation, we may fall back upon this most certain fact, that God is righteous, and his dealings with us are righteous too. It should be our glory to sing this brave confession when all things around us suggest the contrary. That is the richest adoration which rises from the lips of faith when carnal reason mutters about undue severity, and the like.

138. Thy testimonies that thou hast commanded are righteous and very faithful.

All that which God hath testified in his word is right and truthful. His testimonies are righteous, and may be relied upon for the present; they are faithful, and may be trusted in for the future. About every portion of the inspired testimonies there is a divine authority: they are published by God's command, and they bear the impress of the royal style which carries omnipotence in it Not only the precepts but the promises also are commanded of the Lord, and so are all the teachings of Scripture. It is not left to our choice whether we will accept them or not; they are issued by royal command, and are not to be questioned. Their characteristic is that they are like the Lord who has proclaimed them, they are the essence of justice and the soul of truth. God's word is righteous, and cannot be impeached; it is faithful, and cannot be questioned; it is true from the beginning, and it will be true unto the end.

Dwell upon that sweet word—"very faithful." What a mercy that we have a God to deal with who is scrupulously faithful, true to all the items and details of his promises, punctual to time, steadfast during all time! Well may we risk all upon a word which is "ever faithful, ever sure."

Since in these verses the Psalmist dwells upon the righteousness of God and of his words, it becomes us to consider the divine character, and to endeavour to imitate it. "If ye know that he is righteous, ye know that every one that doeth righteousness is born of him": 1 John 2:29.

139. My zeal hath consumed me, because mine enemies have forgotten thy words. In the last two verses David spoke concerning his God and his law; here he speaks of himself, and says, "My zeal hath consumed me, because mine enemies have forgotten thy words": this was no doubt occasioned by his having so clear a sense of the admirable character of God's word. His zeal was like a fire burning within his soul. The sight of man's forgetfulness of God acted as a fierce blast to excite the fire to a more vehement flame, and it blazed until it was ready to consume him. David could not bear that men should forget God's words. He was ready to forget himself, ay, to consume himself, because these men forgot God. The ungodly were David's enemies: his enemies, because they hated him for his godliness; his enemies, because he abhorred them for their ungodliness. These men had gone so far in iniquity, that they not only violated and neglected the commands of God, but they appeared actually to have forgotten them. This put David into a great heat; he burned with indignation. How dare they trample on sacred things! How could they utterly ignore the commands of God himself! He was astonished, and filled with holy anger. Have we not some who profess to be Christians, who know the truth, but live as if they had forgotten it?

140. Thy word is very pure: therefore thy servant loveth it.

"Thy word is very pure." It is truth distilled, holiness in its quintessence. In the word of God there is no admixture of error or sin. It is pure in its sense, pure in its language, pure in its spirit, pure in its influence, and all this to the very highest degree—"very pure."

"Therefore thy servant loveth it." which is a proof that he himself was pure in heart; for only those who are pure love God's word because of its purity. His heart was knit to the word because of its glorious holiness and truth. He admired it, delighted in it, sought to practise it, and longed to come under its purifying power.

141. I am small and despised: yet do not I forget thy precepts. That fault of forgetfulness which he condemned in others (Psalms 119:139) could not be charged upon himself. His enemies made no account of him, regarded him as a man without power or ability, and, therefore, looked down upon

him. He appears to accept the situation and humbly take the lowest room, but he carries God's word with him. How many a man has been driven to do some ill action in order to reply to the contempt of his enemies! to make himself conspicuous he has either spoken or acted in a manner which he could not justify. The beauty of the Psalmist's piety was that it was calm and well-balanced, and as he was not carried away by flattery, so he was not overcome by shame. If small, he the more jealously attended to the smaller duties; and if despised, he was the more in earnest to keep the despised commandments of God.

142. Thy righteousness is an everlasting righteousness, and thy law is the truth.

"Thy righteousness is an everlasting righteousness." Having in a previous verse ascribed righteousness to God, he now goes on to declare that that righteousness is unchanging, and endures from age to age. This is the joy and glory of the saints, that what God is he always will be, and his mode of procedure towards the sons of men is immutable: having kept his promise, and dealt out justice among his people, he will do so world without end. Both the righteousness and the unrighteousness of men come to an end, but the righteousness of God is without end.

"And thy law is the truth." As God is love, so his law is the truth, the very essence of truth: truth applied to ethics, truth in action, truth upon the judgment-seat. We hear great disputes about "What is truth." "The holy Scriptures are the only answer to that question. Note, that they are not only true, but the truth itself. We may not say of them that they contain the truth, but that they are the truth: "thy law is the truth." There is nothing false about the law or preceptory part of Scripture. Those who are obedient thereto shall find that they are walking in a way consistent with fact; while those who act contrary thereto are walking in a vain show.

Because the word is true it has an everlasting righteousness about it To alter, diminish, or add, is to lie against God.

143. Trouble and anguish have taken hold on me: yet thy commandments are my delights.

"Trouble and anguish have taken hold on me." This affliction may have arisen from his circumstances, or from the cruelty of his enemies, or from his own internal conflicts; but certain it is that he was the subject of much distress, a distress which apprehended him, and carried him away a captive to its power. His griefs, like fierce dogs, had taken hold upon him; he felt their teeth. He had double trouble: trouble without and anguish within: as the apostle Paul put it, "without were fightings, within were fears."

"Yet thy commandments are my delights." Thus he became a riddle: troubled, and yet delighted; in anguish, and yet in pleasure. The child of God can understand this enigma, for well he knows that while he is cast down on account of what he sees within himself, he is all the more lifted up by what he sees in the word. He is delighted with the commandments, although he is troubled with his imperfections. He finds abundant light in the commandments, and by the influence of that light he discovers and mourns over his own darkness. Only the man who is acquainted with the struggles of the spiritual life will understand the expression before us. Let the reader herein find a balance in which to weigh himself. Does he find, even when he is begirt with sorrow, that it is a delightful thing to do the will of the Lord? Does he find more joy in being sanctified than sorrow in being chastised? Then the spot of God's children is upon him.

144. The righteousness of thy testimonies is everlasting: give me understandings and I shall live.

"The righteousness of thy testimonies is everlasting." First he had said that God's testimonies were righteous, then that they were everlasting, and now that their righteousness is everlasting. Thus he gives us a larger and more detailed account of the word of God as he proceeds. The longer he is engaged in writing upon it, the more he has to write. The more we say in praise of holy writ, the more we may say, and the more we can say. God's testimonies to man cannot be assailed, they are righteous from beginning to end; and though ungodly men have opposed the divine justice, especially in the plan of salvation, they have always failed to establish any charge against the Most High. Long as the earth shall stand, long as there shall be a single intelligent creature in the universe, it will be confessed that God's plans of mercy are in all respects marvellous proofs of his love of justice: even that he may be gracious Jehovah will not be unjust.

"Give me understandings and I shall live." This is a prayer which he is constantly praying, that God would give him understanding. Here he evidently considers that such a gift is essential to his living. To live without understanding is not to live the life of a man, but to be dead while we live. Only as we know and apprehend the things of God can we be said to enter into life. The more the Lord teaches us to admire the eternal rightness of his word, and the more he quickens us to the love of such rightness, the happier and the better we shall be. As we love life, and seek many days that we may see good, it behoves us to seek immortality in the everlasting word which liveth and abideth for ever, and to seek good in that renewal of our entire nature which begins with the enlightenment of the understanding and passes on to the regeneration of the entire man. Here is our need of the Holy Spirit, the Lord and Giver of life, and the Guide of all the quickened ones, who shall lead us into all truth. Oh, for the visitations of his grace at this good hour!

We live by the Word of God, in the sense that it preserves us from those sinful ways which would be death to us. To understand and copy the righteousness of God is the best preservative from all our deadly foes. If the Lord will give us understanding so that we do this, we shall indeed live in the highest and best sense, despite the powers of death and hell.

Exposition of Psalm 119:145-152

Exposition of Psalms 119:145-152 145. I CRIED with my whole heart; hear me, O Lord: I will keep thy statutes.

146. I cried unto thee; save me, and I shall keep thy testimonies.

147. I prevented the dawning of the morning, and cried: I hoped in thy word.

148. Mine eyes prevent the night watches, that I might meditate in thy word.

149. Hear my voice according unto thy lovingkindness: O Lord, quicken me according to thy judgment.

150. They draw nigh that follow after mischief: they are far from thy law.

151. Thou art near, O Lord; and all thy commandments are truth.

152. Concerning thy testimonies, I have known of old that thou hast founded them for ever. This section is given up to memories of prayer. The Psalmist describes the time and the manner of his supplication, and pleads with God for deliverance from his troubles. He who has been with God in the closet will find God with him in the furnace. If we have cried we shall be answered. Delayed answers may drive us to importunity; but we need not fear the ultimate result, since God's promises are not uncertain, but are "founded for ever." The whole passage shows us: How he prayed (Psalms 119:145). What he prayed for (Psalms 119:146). When he prayed (Psalms 119:147). How long he prayed (Psalms 119:148). What he pleaded (Psalms 119:149). What happened (Psalms 119:51). How he was rescued (Psalms 119:150). What was his witness as to the whole matter (Psalms 119:152). May the Lord bless our meditations on this instructive passage!

145. "I cried with my whole heart; hear me, O Lord: I will keep thy statutes."

"I cried with my whole heart." His prayer was a sincere, plaintive, painful, natural utterance, as of a creature in pain. We cannot tell whether at all times he used his voice when he thus cried; but we are informed of something which is of much greater consequence—he cried with his heart. Heart-cries are the essence of prayer. He mentions the unity of his heart in this holy engagement. His whole soul pleaded with God: his entire affections, his united desires, all went out towards the living God. It is well when a man can say as much as this of his prayers: it is to be feared that many never cried to God with their whole heart in all their lives. There may be no beauty of elocution about such prayers, no length of expression, no depth of doctrine nor accuracy of diction; but if the whole heart be in them they will find their way to the heart of God.

"Hear me, O Lord." He desires of Jehovah that his cries may not die upon the air, but that God may have respect to them. True supplicants are not satisfied with the exercise itself, they have an end and object in praying, and they look out for it. If God does not hear prayer we pray in vain. The term "hear" is often used in Scripture to express attention and consideration. In one sense God

hears every sound that is made on earth, and every desire of every heart; but David meant much more: he desired a kindly, sympathetic hearing, such as a physician gives to his patient when he tells him his pitiful story. He asked that the Lord would draw near, and listen with friendly ear to the voice of his complaint, with the view of pitying him and helping him. Observe, that his wholehearted prayer goes to the Lord alone; he has no second hope or help. "Hear me, O Lord," is the full range of his petition and expectation.

"I will keep thy statutes." He could not expect the Lord to hear him if he did not hear the Lord, neither would it be true that he prayed with his whole heart unless it was manifest that he laboured with all his might to be obedient to the divine will. His object in seeking deliverance was that he might be free to fulfil his religion, free to carry out every ordinance of the law, free to serve the Lord.

Note well that a holy resolution goes well with an importunate supplication: David is determined to be holy, his whole heart goes with that resolve as well as with his prayers. He will keep God's statutes in his memory, in his affections, and in his actions. He will not wilfully neglect nor willingly violate any one of the divine laws.

146. I cried unto thee; save me, and I shall keep thy testimonies.

"I cried unto thee." Again he mentions that his prayer was unto God alone. The sentence imports that he prayed vehemently, and very often; and that it had become one of the greatest facts of his life that he cried unto God.

"Save me." This was his prayer; very short, but very full. He needed saving; none but the Lord could save him; to the Lord he cried. "Save me," from the dangers which surround me, from the enemies that pursue me, from the temptations which beset me, from the sins which accuse me.

He did not multiply words, but only cried "Save me." Men are never wordy when they are in downright earnest. He did not multiply objects, but asked only for salvation. Men are seldom discursive when they are intent upon the one thing needful.

"And I shall keep thy testimonies." This was his great object in desiring salvation, that he might be able to continue in a blameless life of obedience to God, that he might be able to believe the witness of God, and also to become himself a witness for God. It is a great thing when men seek salvation for so high an end. He did not ask to be delivered that he might sin with impunity; his cry was to be delivered from sin itself. He had vowed to keep the statutes or laws of God; here he resolves to keep the testimonies or doctrines of God, and so to be sound of head as well as clean of hand. Salvation brings all these good things in its train. David had no idea of a salvation which would allow him to live in sin, or abide in error: he knew right well that there is no saving a man while he abides in disobedience and ignorance.

147. I prevented the dawning of the morning, and cried: I hoped in thy word.

"I prevented the dawning of the morning, and cried." He was up before the sun, and began his pleadings before the dew began to leave the grass. Whatever is worth doing is worth doing speedily. This is the third time that he mentions that he cried. He cried, and cried, and cried again. His supplications had become so frequent, fervent, and intense, that he might hardly be said to be doing anything else from morning to night but crying unto his God. So strong was his desire after

salvation that he could not rest in his bed; so eagerly did he seek it that at the first possible moment he was on his knees.

"I hoped in thy word." Hope is a very powerful means of strengthening us in prayer. Who would pray if he had no hope that God would hear him? Who would not pray when he has a good hope of a blessed issue to his entreaties? His hope was fixed upon God's word; and this is a sure anchorage, because God is true, and in no case has he ever run back from his promise, or altered the thing that has gone forth from his mouth. He who is diligent in prayer will never be destitute of hope. Observe that as the early bird gets the worm, so the early prayer is soon refreshed with hope.

148. Mine eyes prevent the night watches, that I might meditate in thy word.

"Mine eyes prevent the night watches." Or rather, the watches. Before the watchman cried the hour, he was crying to God. He did not need to be informed as to how the hours were flying, for every hour his heart was flying towards heaven. He began the day with prayer, and he continued in prayer through the watches of the day, and the watches of the night. The soldiers changed guard, but David did not change his holy occupation. Specially, however, at night did he keep his eyes open, and drive away sleep, that he might maintain communion with his God. He worshipped on from watch to watch as travellers journey from stage to stage.

"That I might meditate in thy word." This had become meat and drink to him. Meditation was the food of his hope, and the solace of his sorrow: the one theme upon which his thoughts ran was that blessed "word" which he continually mentions, and in which his heart so greatly rejoices. He preferred study to slumber, and he learned to forego his necessary sleep for much more necessary devotion. It is instructive to find meditation so constantly connected with fervent prayer: it is the fuel which sustains the flame. How rare an article is it in these days! When do we meet with any who spend nights in meditation? Have we done so ourselves?

149. "Hear my voice according unto thy lovingkindness: O Lord, quicken me according to thy judgment."

"Hear my voice according unto thy lovingkindness." Men find it very helpful to use their voices in prayer; it is difficult long to maintain the intensity of devotion unless we hear ourselves speak; hence David at length broke through his silence, arose from his quiet meditations, and began crying with voice as well as heart unto the Lord his God. Note, that he does not plead his own deservings, nor for a moment appeal for payment of a debt on account of merit; he takes the free-grace way, and puts it, "according unto thy lovingkindness." When God hears prayer according to his lovingkindness he overlooks all the imperfections of the prayer, he forgets the sinfulness of the offerer, and in pitying love he grants the desire though the suppliant be unworthy. It is according to God's lovingkindness to answer speedily, to answer frequently, to answer abundantly, yea, exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or even think. Lovingkindness is one of the sweetest words in our language. Kindness has much in it that is most precious, but lovingkindness is doubly dear; it is the cream of kindness."

"O Lord, quicken me according to thy judgment." This is another of David's wise and ardent prayers. He first cried, "Save me;" then, "Hear me;" and now, "Quicken me." This is often the very best way of delivering us from trouble—to give us more life, that we may escape from death; and

to add more strength to that life, that we may not be overloaded with its burdens. Observe, that he asks to receive quickening according to God's judgment, that is, in such a way as should be consistent with infinite wisdom and prudence. God's methods of communicating greater vigour to our spiritual life are exceedingly wise; it would probably be in vain for us to attempt to understand them; and it will be our wisdom to wish to receive grace, not according to our notion of how it should come to us, but according to God's heavenly method of bestowing it. It is his prerogative to make alive as well as to kill, and that sovereign act is best left to his infallible judgment. Hath he not already given us to have life, and to have it more abundantly? In this gift "he hath abounded toward us in all wisdom and prudence."

150. They draw nigh that follow after mischief: they are far from thy law.

"They draw nigh that follow after mischief." He could hear their footfalls close behind him. They are not following him for his benefit, but for his hurt, and therefore the sound of their approach is to be dreaded. They are not prosecuting a good object, but persecuting a good man. As if they had not enough mischief in their own hearts, they are hunting after more. He sees them going a steeple-chase over hedge and ditch in order to bring mischief to himself, and he points them out to God, and entreats the Lord to fix his eyes upon them, and deal with them to their confusion. They were already upon him, and he was almost in their grip, and therefore he cries the more earnestly.

"They are far from thy law." A mischievous life cannot be an obedient one. Before these men could become persecutors of David they were obliged to get away from the restraints of God's law. They could not hate a saint and yet love the law. Those who keep God's law neither do harm to themselves nor to others. Sin is the greatest of all mischief-makers. David mentions the character of his adversaries to the Lord in prayer, feeling some kind of comfort in the fact that those who hated him hated God also, and broke the law when they sought to work him ill. When we know that our enemies are God's enemies, and ours because they are his, we may well take comfort to ourselves.

151. "Thou art near, O Lord; and all thy commandments are truth."

"Thou art near, O Lord." Near as the enemy might be, God was nearer: this is one of the choicest comforts of the persecuted child of God. The Lord is near to hear our cries, and to speedily afford us succour. He is near to chase away our enemies, and to give us rest and peace.

"And all thy commandments are truth." God neither commands a lie, nor lies in his commands. Virtue is truth in action, and this is what God commands. Sin is falsehood in action, and this is what God forbids. If all God's commands are truth, then the true man will be glad to keep near to them, and therein he will find the true God near to him. This sentence will be the persecuted man's protection from the false hearts that seek to do him mischief: God is near and God is true, therefore his people are safe. If at any time we fall into danger through keeping the commands of God, we need not suppose that we have acted unwisely: we may, on the contrary, be quite sure that we are in the right way; for God's precepts are right and true, and for this very reason wicked men assail us. False hearts hate the truth, and therefore hate those who do the truth. Their opposition may be our consolation; while God's presence upon our side is our glory and delight.

152. Concerning thy testimonies, I have known of old that thou hast founded them for ever.

David found of old that God had founded his testimonies of old, and that they would stand firm throughout all ages. It is a very blessed thing to be so early taught of God that we know the substantial doctrines of the gospel even from our youth. Those who know the eternal truth in their early days will look back upon such knowledge with pleasure in their riper years.

Those who think that David was a young man when he wrote this psalm will find it rather difficult to reconcile this verse with their theory; it is much more probable that he was now grown grey, and was looking back upon what he had known long before. He knew at the very first that the doctrines of God's word were settled before the world began, that they had never changed, and never could by any possibility be altered. He had begun by building on a rock, by knowing that God's testimonies were "founded," that is, grounded, laid as foundations, settled and established; and that they were thus settled with a view to all the ages that should come, and all the changes that should happen. It was because David knew this that he had such confidence in prayer, and was so importunate in it. It is sweet to plead immutable promises with an immutable God. It was because of this that David learned to hope: a man cannot have much expectation from a changing friend, but he may well have confidence in a God who cannot change. It was because of this that he delighted in being near the Lord, for it is a most blessed thing to keep up close intercourse with a Friend who never varies. Let those who choose follow at the heels of the modern school and look for fresh light to break forth which will put the old light out of countenance; we are satisfied with the truth which is as old as the hills, and as fixed as the great mountains. Let "cultured intellects" invent another god, more gentle and effeminate than the God of Abraham; we are well content to worship Jehovah, who is eternally the same. Things everlastingly established are the joy of established saints. Bubbles please boys, but men prize those things which are solid and substantial, with a foundation and a bottom to them which will bear the test of the ages.

Exposition of Psalm 119:153-160

Exposition of Psalms 119:153-160 153. CONSIDER mine affliction, and deliver me: for I do not forget thy law.

154. Plead my cause, and deliver me: quicken me according to thy word.

155. Salvation is far from the wicked: for they seek not thy statutes.

156. Great are thy tender mercies, O Lord: quicken me according to thy judgments.

157. Many are my persecutors and mine enemies; yet do I not decline from thy testimonies.

158. I beheld the transgressors, and was grieved; because they kept not thy word.

159. Consider how I love thy precepts: quicken me, O Lord, according to thy lovingkindness.

160. Thy word is true from the beginning: and every one of thy righteous judgments endureth for ever. In this section the Psalmist seems to draw still nearer to God in prayer, and to state his case and to invoke the divine help with more of boldness and expectation. It is a pleading passage, and the keyword of it is, "Consider." With much boldness he pleads his intimate union with the Lord's cause as a reason why he should be aided. The special aid that he seeks is personal quickening, for which he cries to the Lord again and again.

153. Consider mine affliction, and deliver me: for I do not forget thy law.

"Consider mine affliction, and deliver me." The writer has a good case, though it be a grievous one, and he is ready, yea, anxious, to submit it to the divine arbitration. His matters are right, and he is ready to lay them before the supreme court. His manner is that of one who feels safe at the throne. Yet there is no impatience; he does not ask for hasty action, but for consideration. In effect he cries—"Look into my grief, and see whether I do not need to be delivered. From my sorrowful condition judge as to the proper method and time for my rescue." The Psalmist desires two things, and these two things blended: first, a full consideration of his sorrow; secondly, deliverance; and, then, that this deliverance should come with a consideration of his affliction. It should be the desire of every gracious man who is in adversity that the Lord should look upon his need, and relieve it in such a way as shall be most for the divine glory, and for his own benefit. The words, "mine affliction," are picturesque; they seem to portion off a special spot of woe as the writer's own inheritance: he possesses it as no one else had ever done, and he begs the Lord to have that special spot under his eye: even as a husbandman looking over all his fields may yet take double care of a certain selected plot. His prayer is eminently practical, for he seeks to be delivered; that is, brought out of his trouble and preserved from sustaining any serious damage by it. For God to "consider" is to act in due season: men consider and do nothing; but such is never the case with our God.

"For I do not forget thy law." His affliction was not sufficient, with all its bitterness, to drive out of his mind the memory of God's law; nor could it lead him to act contrary to the divine command. He

forgot prosperity, but he did not forget obedience. This is a good plea when it can be honestly urged. If we are kept faithful to God's precept, we may be sure that God will remain faithful to his promise. If we do not forget his law, the Lord will not forget us. He will not long leave that man in trouble whose only fear in trouble is lest he should leave the way of right.

154. Plead my cause, and deliver me: quicken me according to thy word.

"Plead my cause, and deliver me." In the last verse he had prayed, "Deliver me," and here he specifies one method in which that deliverance might be vouchsafed, namely, by the advocacy of his cause. In providence the Lord has many ways of clearing the slandered of the accusations brought against them. He can make it manifest to all that they have been belied, and in this way he can practically plead their cause. He can, moreover, raise up friends for the godly who will leave no stone unturned till their characters are cleared; or he can smite their enemies with such fearfulness of heart that they will be forced to confess their falsehood, and thus the righteous will be delivered without the striking of a blow. Dr. Alexander reads it, "Strive my strife, and redeem me"—that is, stand in my stead, bear my burden, fight my fight, pay my price, and bring me out to liberty. When we feel ourselves dumb before the foe, here is a prayer made to our hand. What a comfort that if we sin we have an advocate, and if we do not sin the same pleader is engaged on our side!

"Quicken me." We had this prayer in the last section, and we shall have it again and again in this. It is a desire which cannot be too often felt and expressed. As the soul is the centre of everything, so to be quickened is the central blessing. More life means more love, more grace, more faith, more courage, more strength; and if we get these we can hold up our heads before our adversaries. God alone can give this quickening; but to the Lord and Giver of life the work is easy enough, and he delights to perform it.

"According to thy word." David had found the blessing of quickening among the promised things, or at least he perceived that it was according to the general tenor of God's word that tried believers should be quickened and brought up again from the dust of the earth; therefore he pleads the word, and desires the Lord to act to him according to the usual run of that word. It is an implied if not an expressed promise, that the Lord will quicken his people. What a mighty plea is this—"according to thy word"! No gun in all our arsenals can match it.

155. Salvation is far from the wicked: for they seek not thy statutes.

"Salvation is far from the wicked." By their perseverance in evil they have almost put themselves out of the pale of hope. They talk about being saved, but they cannot know anything of it or they would not remain wicked. Every step they have taken in the path of evil has removed them further from the kingdom of grace: they go from one degree of hardness to another till their hearts become as stone. When they fall into trouble it will be irremediable. Yet they talk big, as if they either needed no salvation, or could save themselves whenever their fancy turned that way. They are so far off from salvation that they do not even know what it means.

"For they seek not thy statutes." They do not endeavour to be obedient, but quite the reverse; they seek themselves, they seek evil, and therefore they never find the way of peace and righteousness. When men have broken the statutes of the Lord, their wisest course is by repentance to seek forgiveness, and by faith to seek salvation: then salvation is near them, so

near them that they shall not miss it; but when the wicked continue to seek after mischief, salvation is set further and further from them. Salvation and God's statutes go together: those who are saved by the King of grace love the statutes of the King of glory. The main reason why men are not saved is that they get away from the Word of God.

156. "Great are thy tender mercies, O Lord, quicken me according to thy judgments." This verse is exceedingly like verse one hundred and forty-nine, and yet it is no vain repetition. There is such a difference in the main idea, that the one verse stands out distinct from the other. In the first case he mentions his prayer, but leaves the method of its accomplishment with the wisdom or judgment of God; while here he pleads no prayer of his own, but simply the mercies of the Lord, and begs to be quickened by judgments rather than to be left to spiritual lethargy. We may take it for granted that an inspired author is never so short of thoughts as to be obliged to repeat himself: where we think we have a repetition of the same idea in this psalm we are misled by our neglect of careful study. Each verse is a distinct pearl. Each blade of grass in this field has its own drop of heavenly dew.

"Great are thy tender mercies, O Lord." Here the Psalmist pleads the largeness of God's mercy, the immensity of his tender love; yea, he speaks of mercies—mercies many, mercies tender, mercies great; and with the glorious Jehovah he makes this a plea for his one leading prayer, the prayer for quickening. Quickening is a great and tender mercy; and it is many mercies in one. Shall One so greatly good permit his servant to die? Will not One so tender breathe new life into him?

"Quicken me according to thy judgments." A measure of awakening comes with the judgments of God; they are startling and arousing; and hence the believer's quickening thereby. David would have every severe stroke sanctified to his benefit, as well as every tender mercy. The first clause of this verse may run, "Many," or "manifold are thy compassions, O Jehovah." This he remembers in connection with the "many persecutors" of whom he will speak in the next verse. By all these many mercies he pleads for enlivening grace, and thus he has many strings to his bow. We shall never be short of arguments if we draw them from God himself, and urge both his mercies and his judgments as reasons for our quickening.

157. Many are my persecutors and mine enemies; yet do I not decline from thy testimonies.

"Many are my persecutors and mine enemies." Those who actually assail me, or who secretly abhor me, are many. He sets this over against the many tender mercies of God. It seems a strange thing that such a truly godly man, as David was, should have many enemies; but it was inevitable. The disciple cannot be loved where his Master is hated. The seed of the serpent must oppose the seed of the woman: it is their nature.

"Yet do I not decline from thy testimonies." He did not deviate from the truth of God, but proceeded in the straight way, however many adversaries might endeavour to block up his path. Some men have been led astray by one enemy, but here is a saint who held on his way in the teeth of many persecutors. There is enough in the testimonies of God to recompense us for pushing forward against all the hosts that may combine against us. So long as they cannot drive or draw us into a spiritual decline, our foes have done us no great harm; indeed, they have accomplished nothing by their malice. If we do not decline they are defeated. If they cannot make us sin they have missed their mark. Faithfulness to the truth is victory over our enemies.

158. I beheld the transgressors, and was grieved; because they kept not thy word.

"I beheld the transgressors." I saw the traitors; I understood their character, their object, their way, and their end. I could not help seeing them, for they pushed themselves into my way. As I was obliged to see them, I fixed my eyes on them, to learn what I could from them.

"And was grieved." I was sorry to see such sinners. I was sick of them, disgusted with them, I could not endure them. I found no pleasure in them, they were a sad sight to me, however fine their clothing or witty their chattering. Even when they were most mirthful a sight of them made my heart heavy; I could not tolerate either them or their doings.

"Because they kept not thy word." My grief was occasioned more by their sin against God than by their enmity against myself. O Lord, I could bear their evil treatment of my words, but not their neglect of thy word. Thy word is so precious to me that those who will not keep it move me to indignation; I cannot keep the company of those who keep not God's word. That they should have no love for me is a trifle; but to despise the teaching of the Lord is abominable.

159. "Consider how I love thy precepts: quicken me, O Lord, according to thy lovingkindness."

"Consider." or see, "how I love thy precepts." A second time he asks for consideration. As he said before, "Consider mine affliction," so now he says "Consider mine affection." He loved the precepts of God—loved them unspeakably—loved them so as to be grieved with those who did not love them. This is a sure test: many there are who have a warm side towards the promises, but as for the precepts, they cannot endure them. The Psalmist so loved everything that was good and excellent, that he loved all that God had commanded. The precepts are all of them wise and holy, therefore the man of God loved them extremely, loved to know them, to think of them, to proclaim them, and principally to practise them. He asked the Lord to remember and consider this, not upon the ground of merit, but that it should serve as an answer to the slanderous accusations which at this time were the sting of his sorrow.

"Quicken me, O Lord, according to thy lovingkindness." Here he comes back to his former prayer, "Quicken me" (v. 154), "quicken me" (v. 156). "Quicken me." He prays again the third time, using the same words. There is no harm in using repetitions: the thing forbidden is the using of vain repetitions, as the heathen do.

David felt like one who was half stunned with the assaults of his foes, ready to faint under their incessant malice; hence he cries, "Quicken me." What he wanted was revival, restoration, renewal; therefore he pleaded for more life. O thou who didst quicken me when I was dead, quicken me again, that I may not return to the dead! Quicken me, that I may outlive the blows of my enemies, the faintness of my faith, and the swooning of my sorrow. This time he does not say, "Quicken me according to thy judgments," but, "Quicken me, O Lord, according to thy lovingkindness." On the love and mercy of God he places his last and greatest reliance. This is the great gun which he brings up last to the conflict: it is his ultimate argument; if this succeed not, he must fail. He has long been knocking at mercy's gate, and with this plea he strikes his heaviest blow. When he had fallen into great sin this was his plea, "Have mercy upon me, O God, according to thy lovingkindness," and now that he is in great trouble he flies to the same effectual reasoning. Because God is love he will give us life; because he is kind he will again kindle the heavenly flame within us.

160. Thy word is true from the beginning: and every one of thy righteous judgments endureth, for ever. The sweet singer finishes up this section in the same way as the last, by dwelling upon the sureness of the truth of God. It will be well for the reader to note the likeness between verse 144, verse 152, and the present one.

"Thy word is true." Whatever the transgressors may say, God is true, and his word is true. The ungodly are false, but God's word is true. They charge us with being false, but our solace is that God's true word will clear us.

"From the beginning." God's word has been true from the first moment in which it was spoken, true throughout the whole of history, true to us from the instant in which we believed it; ay, true to us before we were true to it. Some read it, "Thy word is true from the head"; true as a whole, true from top to bottom. Experience had taught David this lesson, and experience is teaching us the same. The Scriptures are as true in Genesis as in Revelation, and the five books of Moses are as inspired as the four Gospels.

"And every one of thy righteous judgments endureth for ever." That which thou hast decided remains irreversible in every case. Against the decisions of the Lord no writ of error can be demanded, neither will there ever be a repealing of any of the acts of his sovereignty. There is not one single mistake either in the word of God or in the providential dealings of God. Neither in the book of revelation nor of providence will there be any need to put a single line of errata. The Lord has nothing to regret or to retract, nothing to amend or to reverse. All God's judgments, decrees, commands, and purposes are righteous, and as righteous things are lasting things, every one of them will outlive the stars. "Till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law, till all be fulfilled." God's justice endureth for ever. This is a cheering thought; but there is a much sweeter one, which of old was the song of the priests in the temple; let it be ours: "His mercy endureth for ever."

Exposition of Psalm 119:161-168

Exposition of Psalms 119:161-168 161. PRINCES have persecuted me without a cause: but my heart standeth in awe of thy word.

162. I rejoice at thy word, as one that findeth great spoil.

163. I hate and abhor lying: but thy law do I love.

164. Seven times a day do I praise thee because of thy righteous judgments.

165. Great peace have they which love thy law: and nothing shall offend them.

166. Lord, I have hoped for thy salvation, and done thy commandments.

167. My soul hath kept thy testimonies; and I love them exceedingly.

168. I have kept thy precepts and thy testimonies: for all my ways are before thee.

We are drawing near to the end. The pulse of the Psalm beats more quickly than usual; the sentences are shorter, the sense is more vivid, the strain is more full and deep. The veteran of a thousand battles, the receiver of ten thousand mercies, rehearses his experience, and anew declares his loyalty to the Lord and his law. Oh, that when we come to the close of life we may be able to speak as David does as he closes his life-psalm! Not boastfully, but still boldly, he places himself among the obedient servants of the Lord. Oh, to be clear in conscience when life's sun is setting!

161. Princes have persecuted me without a cause: but my heart standeth in awe of thy word.

"Princes have persecuted me without a cause." Such persons ought to have known better; they should have had sympathy with one of their own rank. A man expects a fair trial at the hands of his peers. It is ignoble for any one to be prejudiced; but worst of all for noblemen to be so. If honour were banished from all other breasts it should remain in the bosom of kings, and certainly honour forbids the persecution of the innocent. Princes are appointed to protect the virtuous and avenge the oppressed, and it is a shame when they themselves become the assailants of the righteous. It was a sad case when the man of God found himself attacked by the judges of the earth, for their eminent position added weight and venom to their enmity. It was well that the sufferer could truthfully assert that this persecution was "without a cause." He had not broken their laws, he had not injured them, he had not even desired to see them injured: he had not been an advocate of rebellion or anarchy, he had neither openly nor secretly opposed their power, and therefore, while this made their oppression the more inexcusable, it took away a part of its sting, and helped the brave-hearted servant of God to bear up under their oppressions.

"But my heart standeth in awe of thy word." He might have been overcome by awe of the princes, had it not been that a greater fear drove out the less, and he was swayed by awe of God's word. How little are crowns and sceptres in the judgment of that man who perceives a more majestic

royalty in the commands of his God! We are not likely to be disheartened by persecution, nor driven by it into sin, if the word of God exerts supreme power over our minds.

162. I rejoice at thy word, as one that findeth great spoil. His awe did not prevent his joy; his fear of God was not of the kind which perfect love casts out, but of the sort which it nourishes. He trembled at the word of the Lord, and yet rejoiced at it. He compares his joy to that of one who has been long in battle, and has at last won the victory and is dividing the spoil. This usually falls to the lot of princes; and though David was divided from other monarchs by their persecution of him, yet he had victories of his own, which they understood not, and treasures in which they could not share. He could say,—

"With causeless hate by princes chased, Still on thy word my heart is placed. That word I dread; that word I hold More dear than heaps of captured gold."

"David's spoil" was more than equal to the greatest gains of all the mighty men. His holy booty taken by his earnest contention for the truth of God was greater than all the trophies that can be gained in war. Grace divides greater spoil than falls to the lot of sword or bow. In the evil times we have to fight hard for divine truth: every doctrine costs us a battle. But when we gain a full understanding of eternal truth by personal struggles it becomes doubly precious to us. If we have unusual battling for the word of God, may we have for our spoil a firmer hold upon the priceless word!

Perhaps the passage may mean that the Psalmist rejoiced as one who comes upon hidden treasure for which he has not fought, in which case we find the analogy in the man of God who, while reading the Bible, makes grand and blessed discoveries of the grace of God laid up for him—discoveries which surprise him, for he looked not to find such a prize. Whether we come by the truth as finders or as warriors fighting for it, the heavenly treasure should be equally dear to us. With what quiet joy does the ploughman steal home with his golden find! How victors shout as they share the plunder! How glad should that man be who has discovered his portion in the promises of Holy Writ, and is able to enjoy that portion for himself, knowing by the witness of the Holy Spirit that it is all his own!

163. I hate and abhor lying: but thy law do I love.

"I hate and abhor lying." A double expression for an inexpressible loathing. Falsehood in doctrine, in life, or in speech, falsehood in any form or shape, had become utterly detestable to the Psalmist. This was a remarkable statement for an Oriental to make; for, generally, lying is the delight of Easterns, and the only wrong they see in it is when their skill is at fault, so that the lie is found out. David himself had made much progress when he had come to this; for he, too, had practised guile in his day. He does not, however, alone refer to falsehood in conversation; he evidently intends perversity in faith and teaching. He wrote down all opposition to the God of truth as lying, and then he turned his whole soul against it with the intensest form of indignation. Godly men should detest false doctrine even as they abhor any other lie. "But thy law do I love." He did not merely yield to it, but he had great pleasure in it. A sullen obedience is essentially rebellion: only a hearty love will secure sincere loyalty to law. David loved the law of God because it is the foe of falsehood and the guardian of truth. His love was as ardent as his hate: he intensely loved the word of God, which is in itself pure truth. True men love truth, and hate lying. It is well for us to

know which way our hates and loves run; and we may do essential service to others by declaring what are the objects of our admiration and detestation. Both love and hate are contagious, and when they are sanctified the wider their influence the better.

164. Seven times a day do I praise thee because of thy righteous judgments.

He laboured perfectly to praise his perfect God, and therefore fulfilled the perfect number of songs—that number being seven. He reached a Sabbath in his praise, and before he rested on his bed he found sweet rest in the joyful adoration of Jehovah. Seven may also intend notable frequency. Frequently he lifted up his heart in thanksgiving to God for his divine teachings in the word, and for his divine actions in providence. With his voice he extolled the righteousness of the Judge of all the earth. As often as he thought of God's ways a song leaped to his lips. At the sight of the oppressive princes, and at the hearing of the abounding falsehood around him, he felt all the more bound to adore and magnify God, who in all things is truth and righteousness. When others slander us, or in any other way rob us of our just meed of praise, it should be a warning to us not to fall into the same conduct towards our God, who is so much more worthy of honour. If we praise God when we are persecuted, our music will be all the sweeter to him because of our constancy in suffering. If we keep clear of all lying, our song will be the more acceptable because it comes out of honest lips. If we never flatter men, we shall be in the better condition for honouring the Lord. Do we praise God seven times a day? Alas! the question needs altering—Do we praise him once in seven days? O shameful fraud, which deprives the Ever Blessed of the music of this lower sphere! The pre-eminent holiness of Jehovah's laws and acts should bring forth from us continued praise. Happy are holy men to be ruled by a righteous governor who never errs! Each lover of righteousness will say in his heart—

"Just are thy laws; I daily raise The sevenfold tribute of my praise."

165. Great peace have they which love thy law: and nothing shall offend them.

"Great peace have they which love thy law." What a charming verse is this! It deals not with those who perfectly keep the law—for where should such men be found?—but with those who love it, whose hearts and hands are made to square with its precepts and demands. These men are ever striving, with all their hearts, to walk in obedience to the law, and though they are often persecuted they have peace, yea, great peace; for they have learned the secret of the reconciling blood, they have felt the power of the comforting Spirit, and they stand before the Father as men accepted. The Lord has given them to feel his peace, which passeth all understanding. They have many troubles, and are likely to be persecuted by the proud; but their usual condition is that of deep calm—a peace too great for "these light afflictions" to break.

"And nothing shall offend them," or, "shall really injure them." "All things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose." It must needs be that offences come; but these lovers of the law are peacemakers, and so they neither give nor take offence. That peace which is founded upon conformity to God's will is a living and lasting one, worth writing of with enthusiasm, as the Psalmist here does.

166. "Lord, I have hoped for thy salvation, and done thy commandments."

Here we have salvation by grace, and the fruits thereof. All David's hope was fixed upon God, he looked to him alone for salvation; and then he endeavoured most earnestly to fulfil the commands of his law. Those who place least reliance upon good works are very frequently those who have the most of them: that same divine teaching which delivers us from confidence in our own doings leads us to abound in every good work to the glory of God. In times of trouble there are two things to be done, the first is to hope in God, and the second is to do that which is right. The first without the second would be mere presumption; the second without the first mere formalism. It is well if in looking back we can claim to have acted in the way which is commanded of the Lord. If we have acted rightly towards God we are sure that he will act kindly towards us.

167. My soul hath kept thy testimonies; and I love them exceedingly.

"My soul hath kept thy testimonies." My outward life has kept thy precepts, and my inward life, my soul, has kept thy testimonies. God has borne testimony to many sacred truths, and these we hold fast with all our heart and soul, for we value them as life itself. The gracious man stores up the truth of God within his heart as a treasure exceedingly dear and precious—he keeps it His secret soul, his inmost self, becomes the guardian of these divine teachings which are his sole authority in soul matters. To him it becomes a great joy in his old age to be able to say, "My soul hath kept thy testimonies."

"And I love them exceedingly." This was why he kept them, and, having kept them, this was the result of the keeping. He did not merely store up revealed truth by way of duty, but because of a deep, unutterable affection for it. He felt that he could sooner die than give up any part of the revelation of God. The more we store our minds with heavenly truth, the more deeply shall we be in love with it: the more we see the exceeding riches of the Bible, the more will our love exceed measure, and exceed expression.

168. I have kept thy precepts and thy testimonies; for all my ways are before thee.

"I have kept thy precepts and thy testimonies." Both the practical and the doctrinal parts of God's word he had stored up, and preserved, and followed. It is a blessed thing to see the two forms of the divine word equally known, equally valued, equally confessed: there should be no picking and choosing as to the mind of God. We know those who endeavour to be careful as to the precepts, but who seem to think that the doctrines of the gospel are mere matters of opinion, which they may shape for themselves. This is not a perfect condition of things. We have known others again who are very rigid as to the doctrines, and painfully lax with reference to the precepts. This also is far from right. When the two are "kept" with equal earnestness, then have we the perfect man.

"For all my ways are before thee." Probably he means to say that this was the motive of his endeavouring to be right both in head and heart, because he knew that God saw him, and under the sense of the divine presence he was afraid to err. Or else he is thus appealing to God to bear witness to the truth of what he has said. In either case it is no small consolation to feel that our heavenly Father knows all about us, and that if princes speak against us, and worldlings fill their mouths with cruel lies, yet he can vindicate us, for there is nothing secret or hidden from him.

We are struck with the contrast between this verse, which is the last of its octave, and verse 176, which is similarly placed in the next octave. This is a protest of innocence, "I have kept thy precepts," and that a confession of sin, "I have gone astray like a lost sheep." Both were sincere,

both accurate. Experience makes many a paradox plain, and this is one. Before God we may be clear of open fault, and yet at the same time mourn over a thousand heart-wanderings which need his restoring hand.

Exposition of Psalm 119:169-176

Exposition of Psalms 119:169-176 169. LET my cry come near before thee, O Lord: give me understanding according to thy word.

170. Let my supplication come before thee: deliver me according to thy word.

171. My lips shall utter praise, when thou hast taught me thy statutes.

172. My tongue shall speak of thy word: for all thy commandments are righteousness.

173. Let thine hand help me; for I have chosen thy precepts.

174. I have longed for thy salvation, O Lord; and thy law is my delight.

175. Let my soul live, and it shall praise thee; and let thy judgments help me.

176. I have gone astray like a lost sheep; seek thy servant; for I do not forget thy commandments. The Psalmist is now at the last section of the psalm, and his petitions gather still more force and fervency; he seems to break into the inner circle of divine fellowship, and to come even to the feet of the great God whose help he is imploring. This nearness creates the most lowly view of himself, and leads him to close the psalm, prostrate in the dust, in deepest self-humiliation, begging to be sought out like a lost sheep.

169. "Let my cry come near before thee, O Lord: give me understanding according to thy word."

"Let my cry come near before thee, O Lord." He is tremblingly afraid lest he should not be heard. He is conscious that his prayer is nothing better than the "cry" of a poor child, or the groan of a wounded beast. He dreads lest it should be shut out from the ear of the Most High; but he very boldly prays that it may come before God, that it may be in his ear, under his notice, and looked upon with his acceptance. Yea, he goes further, and entreats, "Let my cry come near before thee, O Lord": he wants the Lord's attention to his prayer to be very close and considerate. He uses a figure of speech and personifies his prayer. We may picture his prayer as Esther, venturing into the royal presence, entreating an audience, and begging to find favour in the sight of the blessed and only Potentate. It is a very sweet thing to a suppliant when he knows of a surety that his prayer has obtained audience, when it has trodden the sea of glass before the throne, and has come even to the footstool of the glorious seat around which heaven and earth adore. It is to Jehovah that this prayer is expressed with trembling earnestness—our translators, filled with holy reverence, translate the word, "O Lord." We crave audience of none else, for we have confidence in none beside.

"Give me understanding according to thy word." This is the prayer about which the Psalmist is so exceedingly anxious. With all his gettings he would get understanding, and whatever he misses he is resolved not to miss this priceless boon. He desires spiritual light and understanding, as it is promised in God's word, as it proceeds from God's word, and as it produces obedience to God's word. He pleads as though he had no understanding whatever of his own, and asks to have one

given to him. "Give me understanding." In truth, he had an understanding according to the judgment of men; but what he sought was an understanding according to God's word, which is quite another thing. To understand spiritual things is the gift of God. To have a judgment enlightened by heavenly light and conformed to divine truth is a privilege which only grace can give. Many a man who is accounted wise after the manner of this world is a fool according to the word of the Lord. May we be among those happy children who shall all be taught of the Lord!

170. Let my supplication come before thee: deliver me according to thy word.

"Let my supplication come before thee." It is the same entreaty with a slight change of words. He humbly calls his cry a supplication, a sort of beggar's petition; and again he asks for audience and for answer. There might be hindrances in the way to an audience, and he begs for their removal—"Let my supplication come." Other believers are heard by the Great Lord himself—let my prayer come before thee: let me also have audience of my God.

"Deliver me according to thy word." Rid me of mine adversaries, clear me of my slanderers, preserve me from my tempters, and bring me up out of all my afflictions, even as thy word has led me to expect thou wilt do. It is for this that in the previous verse he seeks understanding. His enemies would succeed through his folly, if they succeeded at all; but if he exercised a sound discretion they would be baffled, and he would escape from them. The Lord in answer to prayer frequently delivers his children by making them wise as serpents as well as harmless as doves.

171. My lips shall utter praise, when thou hast taught me thy statutes.

He will not always be pleading for himself, he will rise above all selfishness, and render thanks for the benefit received. He promises to praise God when he has obtained practical instruction in the life of godliness: this is something to praise for, no blessing is more precious. The best possible praise is that which proceeds from men who honour God, not only with their lips, but in their lives. We learn the music of heaven in the school of holy living. He whose life honours the Lord is sure to be a man of praise. David would not be silent in his gratitude, but he would express it in appropriate terms: his lips would utter what his life had practised. Eminent disciples are wont to speak well of the master who instructed them; and this holy man, when taught the statutes of the Lord, promises to give all the glory to him to whom it is due.

172. My tongue shall speak of thy word: for all thy commandments are righteousness.

"My tongue shall speak of thy word." When he had done singing he began preaching. God's tender mercies are such that they may be either said or sung. When the tongue speaks of God's word it has a most fruitful subject; such speaking will be as a tree of life, whose leaves shall be for the healing of the people. Men will gather together to listen to such talk, and they will treasure it up in their hearts. The worst of us is, that for the most part we are full of our own words, and speak but little of God's word. Oh, that we could come to the same resolve as this godly man, and say henceforth, "My tongue shall speak of thy word"! Then should we break through our sinful silence; we should no more be cowardly and halfhearted, but should be true witnesses for Jesus. It is not only of God's works that we are to speak, but of his word. We may extol its truth, its wisdom, its preciousness, its grace, its power; and then we may tell of all it has revealed, all it has promised, all it has commanded, and all it has effected. The subject gives us plenty of sea-room; we may speak on for ever: the tale is for ever telling, yet untold.

"For all thy commandments are righteousness." David appears to have been mainly enamoured of the preceptive part of the word of God, and concerning the precept his chief delight lay in its purity and excellence. When a man can speak thus from his heart, his heart is indeed a temple of the Holy Ghost.

He has said aforetime (verse 138), "Thy testimonies are righteous," but here he declares that they are righteousness itself. The law of God is not only the standard of right, but it is the essence of righteousness. This the Psalmist affirms of each and every one of the precepts without exception. He felt like Paul—"The law is holy, and the commandment holy, and just, and good." When a man has so high an opinion of God's commandments, it is little wonder that his lips should be ready to extol the ever-glorious One.

173. Let thine hand help me; for I have chosen thy precepts.

"Let thine hand help me." Give me practical succour. Do not entrust me to my friends or to thy friends, but put thine own hand to the work. Thy hand has both skill and power, readiness and force: display all these qualities on my behalf. I am willing to do the utmost that I am able to do; but what I need is thine help, and this is so urgently required that if I have it not I shall sink. Do not refuse thy succour. Great as thy hand is, let it light on me, even me. The prayer reminds us of Peter walking on the sea and beginning to sink; he, too, cried, "Lord, save me," and the hand of his Master was stretched out for his rescue.

"For I have chosen thy precepts." A good argument A man may fitly ask help from God's hand when he has dedicated his own hand entirely to the obedience of the faith. "I have chosen thy precepts." His election was made, his mind was made up. In preference to all earthly rules and ways, in preference even to his own will, he had chosen to be obedient to the divine commands. Will not God help such a man in holy work and sacred service? Assuredly he will. If grace has given us the heart with which to will, it will also give us the hand with which to perform. Whenever, under the constraints of a divine call, we are engaged in any high and lofty enterprise, and feel it to be too much for our strength, we may always invoke the right hand of God in words like these.

174. "I have longed for thy salvation, O Lord; and thy law is my delight."

"I have longed for thy salvation, O Lord." He speaks like old Jacob on his deathbed; indeed, all saints, both in prayer and in death, appear as one, in word, and deed, and mind. He knew God's salvation, and yet he longed for it; that is to say, he had experienced a measure of it, and he was therefore led to long for something yet higher and more complete. The holy hunger of the saints increases as it is satisfied. There is a salvation yet to come, when we shall be clean delivered from the body of this death, set free from all the turmoil and trouble of this mortal life, raised above the temptations and assaults of Satan, and brought near unto our God, to be like him and with him for ever and ever.

"I have longed for thy salvation, O Jehovah; and thy law is my delight." The first clause tells us what the saint longs for, and this informs us what is his present satisfaction. God's law, contained in the ten commandments, gives joy to believers. God's law, that is, the entire Bible, is a well-spring of consolation and enjoyment to all who receive it. Though we have not yet reached the fulness of our salvation, yet we find in God's word so much concerning a present salvation that we are even now delighted.

175. Let my soul live, and it shall praise thee; and let thy judgments help me.

"Let my soul live." Fill it full of life, preserve it from wandering into the ways of death, give it to enjoy the indwelling of the Holy Ghost, let it live to the fulness of life, to the utmost possibilities of its new-created being.

"And it shall praise thee." It shall praise thee for life, for new life, for eternal life, for thou art the Lord and Giver of life. The more it shall live, the more it shall praise, and when it shall live in perfection it shall praise thee in perfection. Spiritual life is prayer and praise.

"And let thy judgments help me." While I read the record of what thou hast done, in terror or in love, let me be quickened and developed. While I see thy hand actually at work upon me, and upon others, chastening sin, and smiling upon righteousness, let me be helped both to live aright and to praise thee aright. Let all thy deeds in providence instruct me, and aid me in the struggle to overcome sin and to practise holiness. This is the second time he has asked for help in this portion; he was always in need of it, and so are we.

176. I have gone astray like a lost sheep; seek thy servant; for I do not forget thy commandments. This is the finale, the conclusion of the whole matter: "I have gone astray like a lost sheep"—often, wilfully, wantonly, and even hopelessly but for thine interposing grace. In times gone by, before I was afflicted, and before thou hadst fully taught me thy statutes, I went astray. "I went astray" from the practical precepts, from the instructive doctrines, and from the heavenly experiences which thou hadst set before me. I lost my road, and I lost myself. Even now I am apt to wander, and, in fact, have roamed already; therefore, Lord, restore me.

"Am not I thy wilder'd sheep?"

Seek me, O thou Shepherd good, Find, and for thy service keep
The dear purchase of thy blood;
Lost again if thou depart, Hide me, Saviour, in thy heart."

"Seek thy servant." He was not like a dog, that somehow or other can find its way back; but he was like a lost sheep, which goes further and further away from home; yet still he was a sheep, and the Lord's sheep, his property, and precious in his sight, and therefore he hoped to be sought in order to be restored. However far he might have wandered he was still not only a sheep, but God's "servant," and therefore he desired to be in his Master's house again, and once more honoured with commissions for his Lord. Had he been only a lost sheep he would not have prayed to be sought; but being also a "servant," he had the power to pray. He cries, "Seek thy servant," and he hopes not only to be sought, but forgiven, accepted, and taken into work again by his gracious Master.

Notice this confession; many times in the psalm David has defended his own innocence against foul-mouthed accusers; but when he comes into the presence of the Lord his God, he is ready enough to confess his transgressions. He here sums up, not only his past, but even his present life, under the image of a sheep which has broken from its pasture, forsaken the flock, left the shepherd, and brought itself into the wilderness, where it has become as a lost thing. The sheep bleats, and David prays, "Seek thy servant." His argument is a forcible one,—"for I do not forget thy commandments." I know the right, I approve and admire the right. What is more, I love the right, and long for it. I cannot be satisfied to continue in sin, I must be restored to the ways of

righteousness. I have a home-sickness after my God, I pine after the ways of peace; I do not and I cannot forget thy commandments, nor cease to know that I am always happiest and safest when I scrupulously obey thy law and find my joy in doing so. If the grace of God enables us to maintain in our hearts the loving memory of God's commandments, it will surely yet restore us to practical holiness. That man cannot be utterly lost whose heart is still with God. If he be gone astray in many respects, yet still, if he be true in his soul's inmost desires, he will be found again, and fully restored. Yet let the reader remember the first verse of the psalm while he reads the last: the major blessedness lies not in being restored from wandering, but in being upheld in a blameless way even to the end. Be it ours to keep the crown of the causeway, never leaving the King's highway for By-path Meadow, or any other flowery path of sin. May the Lord uphold us even to the end. Yet even then we shall not be able to boast with the Pharisee, but shall still pray with the publican, "God be merciful to me a sinner"; and with the Psalmist, "Seek thy servant."

Let the last prayer of David in this Psalm be ours as we close this book and lift our hearts to the Chief Shepherd of the sheep. Amen.

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