



Coptic Orthodox Diocese of the Southern United States



The Holy Book of Psalms

Psalm 119 (Part 8)

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Introduction

- This is part 8 of Psalm 119 which includes the 15th and the 16th sections, or Hebrews letters Samek and Ayin, verses 113-128
- Samek, or Samech as some write it, is the 15th letter of the Hebrew alphabet, and it is used at the beginning of verbs in verses, 113-120
- So, the first word in each verse begins with the letter Samek
- The previous part provided steps to take in order to put the law into practice, this section demonstrates what life looks like when anchored with confidence and commitment to God's Word
- This part reveals three signs of such a life



Introduction

- The Right actions (vv. 113-114); the right attitude (vv. 115-117); and the right anticipation (vv. 118-120)
- The psalmist addressed the things one should hate, detest, and despise
- The psalmist has used the word *hate* once, in verse 104, “*I hate every false way,*” and he has reserved the word “love” to refer only to God’s Word (verses 47, 48, and 97)
- In this part he uses both “hate” and “love” to refer to the “*double minded*”, and to God’s Word equally
- Verses 121-128 is the 16th part of the Psalm, in which each verse begins with the letter Ayin



Introduction

- In this section, the psalmist lifts up the true desires of his heart to God
- Above all, he wants God's mercy and God's truth, for he is saved by His mercy, and lives by His truth
- Without mercy, we cannot be saved from our sins
- In this *Ayin* part the psalmist presents a perfect balance of obedience
- He explains how the understanding of man's complete inability to please God affects his understanding of obedience
- This portion of Psalm 119 is an example of what it means to be a servant of the Lord and not a servant of self, sin, or worldly ways



Introduction

- The psalmist in this section, as the servant of God, makes seven appeals to the Lord
- He is in distress due to what appears to be some form of persecution and he begins to cry out to God
- Intermingled with the appeals are interjections concerning why he is making such requests, vv. 121-126
- Then, in verses 127 and 128, his *appeals* are followed by an *allegiance* to the Lord and His word with a corresponding hatred of sin



Introduction

General Outline

- Samek: Upheld and Supported by the Word of God 119:113-120
- Ayin: The Servant Seeks the Word 119:121-128

Upheld and Supported by the Word of God 119:113-120



- The first emotion that we are exposed to is hate
- People often think of hate as an evil emotion but actually it is no worse or better than any other
- There are things that we are supposed to hate
- The psalmist perfectly illustrates this
- What are the things that he hates?
- *The double-minded*, A man of a divided mind; a man without firm faith in God, but is driven here and there; a sceptic; a doubter
- It refers to a state of mind or heart in general, where there is no firmness, no stability, a state of mind wavering and doubtful

Upheld and Supported by the Word of God 119:113-120



- The psalmist knew the frustration of dealing with those who cannot choose one way
- They were uncertain and uncommitted in their lives
- As we read in 1 Kings 18:21, *“And Elijah came to all the people, and said, “How long will you falter between two opinions? If the Lord is God, follow Him; but if Baal, follow him. But the people answered him not a word. ”*
- And according to St. James the double-minded is, *“unstable in all his ways.”* (James 1:8)
- In contrast, the *law* of God is sure and certain

Upheld and Supported by the Word of God 119:113-120



- The psalmist has two points in this verse: Rejection of the Path of Wavering Commitment and Passion for God's Word
- To love God's Word is to love God
- To love Him is to be fully and totally committed to Him
- But that requires separation from all that is not God
- To love God requires us to love what He loves and to hate what He hates
- And what is the cure for double-mindedness?
- James 4:8, *"Draw near to God and He will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners; and purify your hearts, you double-minded."*

Upheld and Supported by the Word of God 119:113-120



- St. Augustine says, “after saying, ‘*I hate the double-minded*’ he explains why, by adding, ‘*I love Your law*’ to show, that he did not hate human nature in unrighteous men, but their unrighteousness whereby they are enemy to the law, which he loves.”
- The God the psalmist knew so well through His word became a refuge in troubled times
- This verse testifies to that which he knew of his own personal experience
- This verse provides the reason that the psalmist has such devotion to his God; he calls God his *hiding place* and his *shield*

Upheld and Supported by the Word of God 119:113-120



- The *hope* he had in the *word* of God was not initiated by mere intellectual knowledge; it was founded on a relationship with and security in God Himself *my hiding place and my shield*
- The term *hiding place* refers to a secret place or a place of concealment
- A *shield* is used in wars to protect a warrior from the enemy's attack
- The psalmist finds both concealment, *hiding place*, and cover, *shield* in God
- Because he is secure, held tightly in God's hands, he finds the ability to simply *wait for God's Word*

Upheld and Supported by the Word of God 119:113-120



- *Depart from me, you evildoers*, There is no fellowship between light and darkness, between righteousness and unrighteousness (2 Corinthians 10:16)
- The psalmist knew that the best resolution was to put space between him and these *evildoers*, so he boldly told them, *Depart from me*
- Good men must separate themselves from those who are manifestly workers of iniquity
- He was committed to obedience, to keeping the *commandments* of God

Upheld and Supported by the Word of God 119:113-120



- Association with the wicked hinders men from keeping God's Law
- Not only is there the danger of corruption (1 Corinthians 15:3); but attention is distracted, and energies weakened to, *keep the commandments of my God*
- The psalmist refers to God in very personal terms
- He desires to obey the statutes of *my God*
- He has already committed himself to God and here desires to remain steadfastly devoted to Him
- But in order to keep God's commandments, he needs sustaining grace, *Uphold me according to Your word*

Upheld and Supported by the Word of God 119:113-120



- His idea was that this support *Uphold me* would come *according to God's word*, consistent with God's word and find its source in God's word
- God's sustaining grace, always needed to *uphold* the righteous, is graciously promised them
- *I may live*, The life of the righteous depends upon God's faithfulness to His promise
- God sustains us - there is no other sustainer
- He is asking God to sustain him in the trials and the temptations of life and to help him to bear afflictions

Upheld and Supported by the Word of God 119:113-120



- *And do not let me be ashamed of my hope, As he would be, if God's promise were not kept*
- As if he is saying, “Lord, show the world that my hope is worth something and let not my hope be thought of as being vain.”
- The psalmist could pray this because he had his *hope* properly set
- It was set upon God and His word (verses 43, 49, 74, 81, and 114)
- St. Paul wrote to Timothy in 2 Timothy 1:12 , “*For this reason I also suffer these things; nevertheless, I am not ashamed, for I know whom I have believed and am persuaded that He is able to keep what I have committed to Him until that Day.*”

Upheld and Supported by the Word of God 119:113-120



- *Hold me up*, This is the second request in this brief section for support from God, and especially through His word
- In receiving this support and security, the Psalmist would use it for further obedience to God
- This constant dependence upon God – the constant prayer, *Hold me up, and I shall be safe*– will in fact keep one safe
- He is asking to be kept from falling in the trials and temptations of life
- So even if the evil doers do not leave him alone, he continues to humbly submit to his God and asks God to sustain and support him

Upheld and Supported by the Word of God 119:113-120



- The result again points to God and to His Word – *I shall observe Your statutes continually*
- The child of God who comes and tastes that the Lord is good will be quick to return to Him
- It is an acknowledgment of entire dependence on God for salvation - temporal and eternal
- The psalmist in verse 118, speaks of the righteous judgment of God
- *You reject all those who stray from Your statutes, All who do not follow, obey, and adhere to God's law and regulations are rejected*

Upheld and Supported by the Word of God 119:113-120



- He uses His word *statutes* as a measuring mark for His judgment, rejecting *all those who stray* from His word and the principles revealed therein
- There is a very simple standard by which God judges all humanity: obedience
- The psalmist anticipates and expects God to be true to His Word, that He will throw out all who rebel against Him
- *their deceit is falsehood*, The principles with which they deceive themselves and mislead others are false and baseless; therefore God rejects them

Upheld and Supported by the Word of God 119:113-120



- Those who will be rejected and removed are just *dross*
- God removes the wicked, as the refiner of metals throws away the *dross*
- *Dross* refers to the waste and impurities found in metal that float to the top when the metal is heated to the point of melting and then skimmed off
- *Dross* is worthless and literally good for nothing; therefore, it is discarded
- The wicked are ultimately separated from the righteous, and cast away as *dross*, since they can serve no good end, (Matthew 13:30, 49, 50)

Upheld and Supported by the Word of God 119:113-120



- The psalmist's reply to this is, *Therefore I love Your testimonies*
- Knowing that the wicked are nothing more than *dross* to be skimmed off and thrown away, the psalmist reaffirms his devotion and commitment to his God
- The consideration of these righteous judgments made the psalmist praise God even more
- He praised God and His word *Your testimonies* as righteous measures of judgment
- The psalmist anticipates this coming judgment and he loves God all the more because of it

Upheld and Supported by the Word of God 119:113-120



- Considering what awaits the wicked in final judgment, terrifies the psalmist, *My flesh trembles for fear of You*
- What an incredible contrast; he has hope in the Word and hope in God's sustaining power
- And yet, at the same time, he says he is afraid of God and His judgments
- He loved the Lord but he also feared His judgments
- He feared God's hand of correction because God does not pass over men's sins
- He will chasten His children while there is hope

Upheld and Supported by the Word of God 119:113-120



- The psalmist did not celebrate over the judgment on the wicked; it made him tremble in holy fear himself
- He anticipates judgment which brings a response of holy fear
- This part illustrated fear and hope, love and hate – all having a proper place and focus in a believer's life
- What does one love? What does one hate? What does one fear? That is really at the heart of this section
- People love what they are committed to, what they spend time on, what they connect themselves to
- They hate what they avoid, what they separate from, what you turn their back to

Upheld and Supported by the Word of God 119:113-120



- People fear what they know and believe about their best interest
- In that light they will offer their obedience
- A child of God loves what God loves, hates what God hates, and fears Him and His Word alone
- It is that simple: Obedience is always simple

The Servant Seeks the Word

119:121-128



- There are a few themes that run throughout this section
- There is an emphasis on *doing/acting/making*
- The Hebrew to do, or to make is used three times (vv. 121, 124, & 126)
- There is also an emphasis on the Psalmist as God's *servant* (vv. 122, 124, & 125)
- God is our Master and we are His servants
- This part presents three reminders of the nature of obedience in the life of a believer
- The psalmist begins with a bold assertion and claims to be one who does *justice* and *righteousness*

The Servant Seeks the Word

119:121-128



- He is not only one who supports these qualities, but he actually participates in them
- This means walking in obedience to what he has learned in God's Word
- This is exactly what people would expect of a man who actually uses the Word of God as *a lamp to my feet And a light to my path*
- He had kept the law of God and had made that the rule of his conduct
- The psalmist's life is in conformity to God's Word and as such is an example to all those who watch from the outside; he does *justice* and he does *righteousness*

The Servant Seeks the Word

119:121-128



- The psalmist had been obedient to the divine law, and might, therefore, ask for the divine protection
- Man has no merit of his own; but when he is God's true friend, it is not improper to expect that He will intervene on his behalf
- The psalmist does not claim to be sinless, but in defense of himself and his innocence against those who oppressed him
- David as a king, *"administered judgment and justice to all his people."* (2 Samuel 8:15)
- He could appeal to Saul himself that he has done no evil, *"know and see that there is neither evil nor rebellion in my hand, and I have not sinned against you."* (1 Samuel 24:11)

The Servant Seeks the Word

119:121-128



- The psalmist asked God to defend and stand up for him
- It was only through God defending him that he could avoid the oppression of the proud
- So, Hezekiah (Isaiah 38:14) asks God to “*undertake*” for him against the threat of death
- There is also, no doubt, the further thought that the Divine protection would vindicate the profession which the loyal servant makes of his obedience, as in Job 17:3, where God is named as the only possible guarantee of the sufferer’s innocence
- The oppressors of God's people are generally proud; they are such who deal in proud wrath; it is in their pride, they persecute them

The Servant Seeks the Word

119:121-128



- This provides evidence that his previous claim to *justice and righteousness* was not in an absolute sense
- If he felt completely just and righteous before God, he would not have pleaded for God to stand as a *surety* for him – but he did
- *Be surety for Your servant for good*, This request assumes the biblical truth that God works all things for the *good* of those who love Him (Romans 8:28)
- Immediately after he affirms his active obedience, *I have done justice and righteousness*, he maintains a full dependence upon God to act as a guarantee for him

The Servant Seeks the Word

119:121-128



- Even though he trusts God to stand as *surety* for his *good*, he is not afraid to ask for protection
- These first two verses provide a picture of a balanced obedience
- *My eyes fail from seeking Your salvation*, He looked for help from heaven, but it did not come so soon as he expected
- So, his eyes began to *fail*, and he was sometimes ready to despair
- This waiting expectation shows that faith came before experience
- The psalmist was willing to have faith until the experience came
- He would wait for God's salvation, and wait as long as it took

The Servant Seeks the Word

119:121-128



- This verse is not calling into question the absence of God's salvation or the lack of fulfillment of His promise
- The force is upon the psalmist's certain anticipation that God's promise will most certainly come to pass, even if not currently on the horizon
- Though the eyes fail, yet God's word does not, and therefore those that build upon it, though now discouraged, shall in due time see His salvation
- *Deal with Your servant according to Your mercy, Not according to Your justice* - for, sinners can never urge that as a plea before God

The Servant Seeks the Word

119:121-128



- *Deal*, another request, he is asking God to *do/make/act* with him as God's servant and in accordance with God's own *mercy*
- No man who knows himself could ask of God to deal with him according to the strict and firm principles of justice
- But one may ask Him to deal with him according to mercy
- The psalmist is coming before God in full acknowledgment that he is God's servant, possession, and property
- Therefore, he leans on God's grace and mercy; and this mercy, will be manifested in the role of teacher and student
- The psalmist understood that when God teaches His people, it is evidence of His *mercy*

The Servant Seeks the Word

119:121-128



- For the third time in four verses, the psalmist calls himself a *servant* of God
- He understood that this meant he had obligations to God, and that God – as his Master – had obligations to him
- Therefore, he could ask for *understanding*
- The psalmist wanted *understanding* – not so much to know the future, but so that he would *know* the *testimonies* of God better
- He believed that the word of God could be understood, with the help of God Himself
- *Give me understanding, Cause me to understand/make me discern*

The Servant Seeks the Word

119:121-128



- The psalmist desires of God's Word is to know it truthfully, intellectually, and experientially
- He believed that *understanding* God's word was of great importance, because it would lead him into other wisdom and understanding of life
- *It is time for You to act, O LORD*, Some interpret it as it is time for believers to do something for God
- Others say that it is time for God Himself to do something
- The direct address to the Lord in the latter part of the verse would seem, however, to show that the latter is the true interpretation

The Servant Seeks the Word

119:121-128



- Since people make *void* the law of God, it is time for Him to work, to intervene by His power and restrain them
- Or, to bring them to repentance and to assert His own authority
- It is a desire that God would appear, for the vindication of His own honor and glory
- Yet others believe it is related to the coming of the Messiah
- According to St. Augustine, what would that act be, but the grace that is to be proclaimed in Christ in due time
- Once the law was broken, it was time for the Mercy to send the only-begotten Son of God

The Servant Seeks the Word

119:121-128



- It was always a notion of the Jews that the time of the Messiah's coming would be when it was a time of great wickedness on the earth; and which seems to agree with the word of God, Malachi 2:17
- Though others regarded the word of God as void, the psalmist decided to love His *commandments* all the more in response
- The psalmist expressed in vv. 127-128, his devotion to love strongly
- Both vv. 127 and 128 begin with *therefore*
- Both of these verses are drawing a connection to v. 126

The Servant Seeks the Word

119:121-128



- In light of the fact that the time to act is now, *I therefore love* God's *commandments*
- To love is more than emotion, it is objective and measurable devotion
- This devotion exceeds the devotion to wealth *gold*, even the greatest of wealth, *fine gold*
- The psalmist remembered what kind of men considered the word of God as *void*
- When he considered the arrogant, wicked, enemies, double-minded, and oppressors who had been enemies of God's word, he knew that the word of God was lovely

The Servant Seeks the Word

119:121-128



- The wicked were likened to *dross*, v. 119 that is discarded as worthless when refining metal
- *fine gold*, describes the pure metal that remains after the melting process
- The love and devotion for God's Word exceeds the best choicest of earthly pleasures and desires
- With great confidence, the psalmist proclaimed the perfection, purity, trustworthiness of God's word
- It was *right*, not wrong; and it was right *concerning all things*
- Because the psalmist loved and trusted the word of God so much, he naturally hated *every false way*

The Servant Seeks the Word

119:121-128



- Every single one of God's step-by-step instructions are accurate and correct and will be followed to the letter, because he *hates every false way*
- As Jesus said, "*No one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or else he will be loyal to the one and despise the other.*" (Matthew 6:24)
- And significantly, the psalmist hated *every false way*, not just some of them
- He does not pick and choose among God's commandments which one to obey, but honor them all as perfect, and obey them all
- He had total devotion to follow God entirely

Discussion



- According to verse 114, who is David's "hiding place" and "shield"?
- How do evildoers discourage us from keeping the commandments of God?
- How do we keep the commandments of God? What has to happen first (according to verse 116)?
- What is it that the psalmist fears?

Discussion



- How does the psalmist describe himself in verses 122, 124, and 125? And how does he describe the world around him (vv. 121–122 and 126)?
- What was it that the psalmist wanted to understand better? What does the word “testimony” mean?
- Why are both mercy and truth absolutely essential for us?
- When is it time for God to act according to the psalmist?