



Coptic Orthodox Diocese of the Southern United States



# The Holy Book of Psalms

Psalm 119 (Part 9)

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# Introduction

- This is part 9 of Psalm 119 which includes the 17th and the 18th sections, or Hebrews letters Pe and Tsadde, verses 129-144
- Pe is the 17th letter of the Hebrew alphabet, and it is used at the beginning of verbs in verses, 129-136
- So, the first word in each verse begins with the letter Pe
- In this section the psalmist prays for relationship, *Look upon me, be merciful to me*
- For guidance, *Direct my steps by Your word, let no iniquity have dominion over me*
- For rescue, *Redeem me from the oppression of man*



# Introduction

- And blessing, *Make Your face shine upon Your servant, teach me*
- There is a desperation in the tone of the psalmist as he seeks to know the truths of God's Word
- The psalmist prays that the marvelous law of God, be the rule of his life in spite of temptation and he grieves at neglecting it
- The 18<sup>th</sup> part of this Psalm is verses 137-144 in which each verse begins with the letter Tsadde, or Tzaddi as some write it
- In this section, the psalmist, in the midst of his daily struggles, unfolds a three phases progression which shows us how believers can, should, and must worship God through His Word for our good and His glory



# Introduction

## General Outline

- Pe: Steps Directed by God's Wonderful Word 119:129-136
- Tsadde: The Purity and Truth of God's Word 119:137-144

# Steps Directed by God's Wonderful Word 119:129-136



- The psalmist again declared his wonder in the word of God
- It was a continuing source of fascination to him
- *Your testimonies*, Full of wonderful revelations, commands and promises
- The Holy Scriptures, which testify of God, His mind and will, are wonderful both with respect to the author, the things contained in them, and the use and advantage of them
- They give an account of the wonderful works of creation; of their author and matter; of the manner, order, and time of their being formed

# Steps Directed by God's Wonderful Word 119:129-136



- The Word is a means that mediates God's wonders to His people
- *Your testimonies*, They instruct, elevate, strengthen, and comfort the soul
- The mind is awed by the wisdom of God's *testimonies*
- The wisdom of God is revealed through each chapter and each verse
- There is "*the width and length and depth and height*" (Ephesians 3:18), in God's word and *testimonies* that are truly astonishing
- *Therefore, my soul keeps them*, As a rich treasure
- The enduring, abiding delight he had in the word of God prompted greater obedience

# Steps Directed by God's Wonderful Word 119:129-136



- This was obedience in more than outward action; it was obedience in the soul
- Those that see God's testimonies are wonderful will treasure and cherish it highly and preserve it carefully
- God's testimonies are not only wonderful for the greatness of them, but useful, as a light in a dark place
- The psalmist repeated a previous idea, that God's word brought light to him
- Their very entrance immerses the mind with instruction for they are so deep, overflowing, so clear

# Steps Directed by God's Wonderful Word 119:129-136



- But, there must be such an *entrance*, or there will be no *light*
- The mere hearing of the word with the external ear is of small value, but when the words of God enter into the depth of the heart then *light* is dispersed and spread on all corners of the heart
- *the simple*, According to St. Augustine, they are the meek and humble
- He says, “Be not proud therefore, presume not in your own strength, which is nothing; and your understanding... For it was given for this end, that it might make you a little one instead of great, that it might show that you have not strength to do the law of your own power.”

# Steps Directed by God's Wonderful Word 119:129-136



- This is a *blessing* for *the simple*; God does not forget them
- It is a *promise* for *the simple*; they can approach God's word with confidence, expecting God to give them *understanding*
- Because the word of God is *light*-giving, the psalmist desired God's word like a thirsty animal pants for water
- He may be panting because he is thirsty, or he may be panting gasping for air; but panting always denotes desire
- *I opened my mouth and panted*, Is a metaphor taken from an animal exhausted in the chase
- He runs, open-mouthed, to take in the cooling air and the heart beating high

# Steps Directed by God's Wonderful Word 119:129-136



- Or, as a person out of breath does, through walking or running; he stops and pants, and opens his mouth, to draw in air to his relief
- Or, as hungry and thirsty person pant for food and drink, and open his mouth to receive it
- This metaphor shows his earnestness in his sought for salvation
- *For I longed for Your commandments*, Yet longing that is not acted upon is more *wishing* than longing; true longing will show itself in deeds
- He as one of those *simple* ones, *opened my mouth*, the mouth of his heart, by asking and praying

# Steps Directed by God's Wonderful Word 119:129-136



- And *panted* longed for the spirit of knowledge and mercy that he may understand and observe God's commandments, for he longed both to understand and to observe them
- According to St. Augustine, he opened his mouth, by confessing that he could not do them of himself, and he opened his mouth, by seeking, asking, knocking
- *Look upon me*, it shows how humble his petition is
- During the previous verses he had been expressing his love to God's word, but here he is upon his knees again praying
- He asks not for the work of God's hand, only for a look is enough; and for that he does not claim merit, but beseeches mercy

# Steps Directed by God's Wonderful Word 119:129-136



- He knows he is sinful and will not bear *looking upon* by the Lord, especially with the strict eye of justice
- He appeals to God's *mercy* which shows that it was not any look but a look of grace and *mercy* he prays for
- The psalmist had reason to believe God would answer, knowing that this was God's *custom...toward those who love Your name*
- That *custom* is to *look upon* them (giving them His attention) and to *be merciful* to them
- This promise is a solid ground for trusting, confident prayer in a time of need
- His mercy is the source of all the goodness godly men experience

# Steps Directed by God's Wonderful Word 119:129-136



- *Direct my steps by Your word*, The second request shows what he wanted to do with the mercy received from God
- He wanted to take that mercy and use it to walk rightly before God
- One can walk forward in life with confidence as he finds direction in God's word
- He prays that no form of sin, that no wicked passion, desire, or lust, might be allowed to rule over him
- The psalmist was wise to understand that sin can *have dominion over* a man

# Steps Directed by God's Wonderful Word 119:129-136



- The Apostle Paul recognized the same danger: *“All things are lawful for me, but all things are not helpful. All things are lawful for me, but I will not be brought under the power of any.”* (1 Corinthians 6:12)
- Sin can attempt to gain and hold dominion in one's life
- First it may be in a small or seemingly insignificant area, but that dominion will grow in size and strength
- According to St. Augustine, the more the love of God reigns in every man, so much the less wickedness has dominion over him
- The psalmist prayed for direction in the paths of duty and for deliverance from the power of sin

# Steps Directed by God's Wonderful Word 119:129-136



- *Redeem me*, Third request recognizes that there are dangers beyond the potential dominion of sin in the psalmist's spiritual life
- There are also dangers from *the oppression of man*, from those who would oppose and oppress
- The psalmist asked for this so *that I may keep Your precepts*
- He did not just want liberty from man's oppression so he could serve himself, but so that he could properly obey God
- The psalmist knows oppression can distress and trouble his life, so he prays God will spare him from anything that would hinder his walk with the Lord

# Steps Directed by God's Wonderful Word 119:129-136



- He wants to be governed by divine precepts, not human pressures
- The fourth request is for an experience of the grace and goodness of God
- The shining of God's face upon His servant is a picture of grace, as He illumines the one who desires to do His will
- The language here is similar to the blessing of Aaron which he was commanded to speak to Israel, saying, *"The LORD bless you and keep you; The Lord make His face shine upon you, And be gracious to you; The Lord lift up His countenance upon you, And give you peace."* (Numbers 6:24-26)

# Steps Directed by God's Wonderful Word 119:129-136



- To know the *face* of God shining upon him is to be at peace with God and to know He is at peace with him
- According to St. Augustine *teach me Your statutes* is to *teach me* to do and apply them, *teach me* Your will
- The psalmist does not ask for riches, for silver and gold, but for God's *face* to *shine upon* him
- The psalmist pleads for God's favor in teaching him truth
- He was clearly a man who loved God's truth, but he never felt as if he did not need to know more
- He always sought to learn from God's word

# Steps Directed by God's Wonderful Word 119:129-136



- St. Athanasius says that Jesus Christ is God's *Face* that came into the world to teach us the Truth
- In the closing verse of this section, the psalmist laments that not everyone has the same commitment to truth-keeping as he does, *Rivers of water run down from my eyes*
- It is not a gentle weeping, but his eyes are like a fountain which pours out full-flowing streams, *"Oh, that my head were waters, And my eyes a fountain of tears, That I might weep day and night For the slain of the daughter of my people!"* (Jeremiah 9:1)
- The psalmist did not sorrow over his own troubles, but over the sins of others and the consequences those sins would bring

# Steps Directed by God's Wonderful Word 119:129-136



- As Jesus Christ grieved over Jerusalem (Matthew 23:37-39) and over the hard hearts of the religious leaders (Mark 3:5), so the psalmist grieved here
- It is godly sorrow; for he wept not for his troubles, though they were many, but for the dishonor done to God: *Because men do not keep Your law*
- Why do people reject God's truth?
- It is because they do not love God
- Obedience to God's truth is *evidence* of love for Christ (John 14:15)



# The Purity and Truth of God's Word 119:137-144

- In this section one may note that the word *righteous* or *righteousness* is used frequently
- Understanding that God is righteous, what that means, and how that impacts His Word, is necessary
- In general terms, *righteousness* is a state of correctness or being right
- It assumes a standard and describes a state of perfect harmony with that standard
- But this affirmation of God's righteousness is not only stating that He meets the standard but also that He is the standard



# The Purity and Truth of God's Word 119:137-144

- *Righteous are You*, The righteousness of God, the infinite goodness and perfection of His nature
- The psalmist here sings the Lord's praises because the Lord is without fault, blameless, honest, sinless, just and always right
- There is nothing lacking, nothing incorrect, in God; His will is the eternal rule of equity, and He is *righteous*, for He does all according to it
- He is *righteous* in all His ways and works of nature and grace; in His thoughts, purposes, and counsels; in His providence
- God's judgments, His decisions and decrees, are perfectly straight, *upright*, and have no waver, nor do they fluctuate



# The Purity and Truth of God's Word 119:137-144

- It's because He is *righteous*, that His rules and the way He judges is right
- St. Augustine says, "This righteousness of God and righteous judgment and truth, is to be feared by every sinner: for thereby all who are condemned are condemned of God ... Therefore, the tears of the penitent are needful; since if his impenitent heart were condemned, he would be most justly condemned."
- Not only is God *righteous* but so too is His Word, *Your testimonies*
- The written word of God reflects both His *righteous* character and the fact that He is *very faithful*



# The Purity and Truth of God's Word 119:137-144

- Everything that proceeds from Him is of the perfections of His nature
- God's commandments which bear witness to His Will and man's duty are the expression of His absolute righteousness and of that faithfulness to His covenant which is an unchangeable element of that righteousness
- The Holy Scripture represents and reflects the character of God
- The word of God—the revelation, the mirror revealing who He is, can be trusted because the one without fault spoke it Himself
- The psalmist was grieved and angered by man's disobedience to God's commandments



# The Purity and Truth of God's Word 119:137-144

- The word *zeal* indicates an intense emotion
- Here it is *zeal* for God and His glory
- The living and active word of God brought forth a living and active response from the psalmist
- The more *the enemies* of the psalmist rejected the word of God, the more he was determined to be zealous for those words
- As the difficulties increase, so his zeal increases
- He would make sure that he honored the word of God even if others did not
- The knowledge that he gets from the Word drives him *consumes* him



# The Purity and Truth of God's Word 119:137-144

- Such was the psalmist high view of *the testimonies of* God that his spirit was *consumed* with severe grief in witnessing their neglect
- This brings to mind the passage remembered by the disciples when Jesus cleansed the temple courts of the merchants and moneychangers, (John 2:13-17)
- At that time, the disciples remembered the verse from Psalm 69:9: *Zeal for Your house has eaten Me up*
- This verse carries much the same thought, and reflects the kind of zeal that Jesus had when He cleared the temple courts, *They* had forgotten His words



# The Purity and Truth of God's Word 119:137-144

- Even though there are hindrances, persecution or opposition to the truth, it doesn't make the psalmist doubt, but drives him to another level of love and zeal, *Your word is very pure*
- It is tried, refined, purified, like gold in the furnace, absolutely perfect, without the dross of vanity and fallibility, and proven to be right
- The love he talks about is a hunger for more
- Because of the righteousness, the nature, and the strength of God's word, he cannot get enough of it, especially during difficult times



# The Purity and Truth of God's Word 119:137-144

- A good man loves the word of God which is an evidence of a sanctified heart
- Versus the carnal men who hates the word of God because it forbids and condemns all impurity of flesh and spirit, all impure thoughts, words, and actions
- Our love to the word of God is an evidence of our love to God, when we love it for the sake of its purity, because it bears the image of God's holiness
- If the word of God totally consumes people and their love for Him increases, there will be no place for sin, fear, or anxiety
- Only the truth that brings strength and comfort will stay



# The Purity and Truth of God's Word 119:137-144

- The psalmist felt himself insignificant, both in his own sight *small* and in the view of others *despised*
- Yet he found comfort and strength in remembering the word of God
- It also shows us that the psalmist would not neglect God's word when he was depressed or downcast
- This is often one of the severest tests, and to be faithful in such circumstances is one of the clearest proofs of true attachment to God
- Even though he was small and worthless, he has the Almighty's law and regulations to help him with his relationship with God



# The Purity and Truth of God's Word 119:137-144

- Through God's word, he finds his identity not in the world or himself, but in God
- He might be unimportant, *small*, but he can stand strong by knowing that he is known by the only true God
- The reason that he can sing about God's law, acknowledge and appreciate the Lord, is because he humbled himself and see God through His word
- It's because he knows the Truth that he feels safe and alive
- The psalmist, seeing who God is, is driven to feel small
- The word of God should humble people into submitting to Him and His word



# The Purity and Truth of God's Word 119:137-144

- The Savior was despised by people; the apostles were; the people of God in all ages have been, Hebrews 11:36-38; 1 Corinthians 4:13
- According to the scholar Origen, that *small man* refers to the congregation of the Gentiles, new to faith, despised by the Jews, who preceded them to faith in God (in the Old Covenant); but they were not forgotten by God, who opened before them the gate of faith
- *Your righteousness is an everlasting righteousness, With God there is "no variation or shadow of turning."* (James 1:17)



# The Purity and Truth of God's Word 119:137-144

- His righteousness is pure abstract right, one and the same always - not shifting, like human ideas of justice
- St. Augustine says, "No wonder that those who have forgotten the words of God, who chose to establish their own righteousness, 'are ignorant of God's righteousness' (Romans 10:3). While he, the 'smaller' here, has not forgotten, for he seeks, not his own righteousness, but the righteousness of God; about whom he says: "Your righteousness is an everlasting righteousness, and Your law is truth""
- There never has been a time, nor will there ever be a time when God's righteousness has been anything other than righteous



# The Purity and Truth of God's Word 119:137-144

- The truthfulness of God's Word is directly tied to His personal righteousness
- If He is righteous, then He cannot reveal Himself in a manner that is less than perfectly accurate and correct
- There has never been a time, nor will there ever be a time when Scripture is anything less than completely, wholly, and utterly true
- The psalmist again in verse 143, professes his constant adherence to God, despite the many difficulties and discouragements he met with



# The Purity and Truth of God's Word 119:137-144

- Despite the difficulties of his life, the psalmist still found *delight* in God's word
- He can find delight during affliction and rejoice in hard times because he is finding his rest in the Almighty, the one that controls all things in *righteousness*
- This speaks to his response to trouble rather than the trouble itself
- His appreciation of God and His word was not only valid in good times, but also in *trouble and anguish*
- Even *Trouble and anguish have overtaken* him, he is unmovable in his faith



# The Purity and Truth of God's Word 119:137-144

- He is not looking for delight in circumstances but rather finds delight in knowing, understanding, and obeying God's commandments
- The psalmist ends this contemplation of the character of God's law with a prayer for fuller understanding of it, for through knowledge of it and obedience to it man really lives, truly realizes the purpose of his being
- He found *understanding* the word of God more important than being saved from his *Trouble and anguish*
- Those that know much of the word of God should still desire and want to know more; for there is more to be known



# The Purity and Truth of God's Word 119:137-144

- The psalmist knows that understanding the Lord's word will give him life and courage
- It will revive him and will enable him to stand strong in challenging times
- He seeks understanding of divine and spiritual things
- Understanding will lead to life
- He will *live*, shall be eternally happy, *"And this is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent."* (John 17:3)



# Discussion

- What exactly does the psalmist find wonderful and awe-inspiring?
- What must happen before a man can love and serve the true God?
- What is the most fundamental form of bondage that enslaves men?
- How does the oppression of men prevent a man from living a righteous life?



# Discussion

- How does the psalmist speak of his relationship with God in verse 135?
- What is a proper reaction to the sins of others?
- What is the basis for the righteous laws of God as described in verse 137?
- Why did Jesus overturn the tables in the temple? Was He angry?



# Discussion

- How does the Psalmist view himself in this section?
- Why is this section of the Psalm so relevant to the postmodern relativism of our day?
- What causes *Trouble and anguish* in the Psalmist's heart? What resolves it?