

**ALEPH - TAU**

**THE  
GOLDEN  
ALPHABET**

**PART FIVE  
PSALM 119:113-144**



**C. H. Spurgeon**

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# The Golden Alphabet — Part Five — Psalm 119:113-144

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## Exposition of verses 113 to 120, Samech

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, verse 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 vain-glory, 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 act 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 verse 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 evil-doers 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 verses 121 to 128, Ain**

**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.***

**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 battle’s 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 understanding, 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 works it is as nothing apart from him.

**127. *“Therefore I love thy commandants 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 beget 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 verses 129 to 136, Pe**

**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, and 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 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 naught but sin,  
And after none but thee,  
And then I would, O that I might!  
A constant weeper be.”***

## Exposition of verses 137 to 144, Tzaddi

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 practice 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 (verse 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, and 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 grief's, 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 fighting's, 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 understanding, and I shall live."***

***"The righteousness of thy testimonies is everlasting,"*** First he had said that God's testimonies were righteous, and 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 understanding, 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 behooves 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.

The fifth of six booklets.

