

ALEPH - TAU

**THE
GOLDEN
ALPHABET**

**PART FOUR
PSALM 119:81-112**



C. H. Spurgeon

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The Golden Alphabet — Part Four — Psalm 119:81-112

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Exposition of verses 81 to 88, Caph

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

“My soul fainteth for thy salvation.” He wished for no deliverance but that which came from God: his one desire was for “thy salvation.” But for that divine deliverance he was eager to the last degree — up to the full measure of his strength, yea, and beyond it, till he fainted. So strong was his desire that it produced prostration of spirit. He grew weary with waiting, faint with watching, sick with urgent need. Thus the sincerity and eagerness

of his desires were proved. Nothing else could satisfy him but deliverance wrought out by the hand of God; his inmost nature yearned, and pined for salvation from the God of all grace, and he must have it or utterly fail.

“But I hope in thy word.” Therefore he felt that salvation would come; for God cannot break his promise, nor disappoint the hope which his own word has excited: yea, the fulfilment of his word is near at hand when our hope is firm and our desire fervent. Hope alone can keep the soul from fainting by using the smelling-bottle of the promise. Yet hope does not quench desire for a speedy answer to prayer; it increases our importunity, for it both stimulates ardour and sustains the heart under delays. To faint for salvation, and to be kept from utterly failing of the hope of it, is the frequent experience of the Christian man. We are “faint yet pursuing.” Hope sustains when desire exhausts. While the grace of desire throws us down, the grace of hope lifts us up again.

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

His eyes gave out with eagerly gazing for the kind appearance of the Lord, while his heart in weariness cried out for speedy comfort. To read the word till the eyes can no longer see is but a small thing compared with watching for the fulfilment of the promise till the inner eyes of expectancy begin to grow dim with hope deferred. We may not set times to God, for this is to limit the Holy One of Israel; yet we may urge our suit with importunity, and make fervent inquiry as to why the promise tarrys. David sought no comfort except that which comes from God; his question is,

“When wilt thou comfort me?” If help does not come from heaven it will never come at all: all the good man’s hopes look that way, he has not a glance to dart in any other direction. This experience of waiting and fainting is well-known by full-grown saints, and it teaches them many precious lessons; which they would never learn by any other means. Among the choice results is this one — that the body rises into sympathy with the soul, both heart: and flesh cry out for the living God, and even the eyes find a tongue, saying, ***“When wilt thou comfort me?”*** It must be an

intense longing which is not satisfied to express itself by the lips, but speaks with the eyes, by those eyes failing through intense watching. Eyes can speak right eloquently; they use both mutes and liquids, and can sometimes say more than tongues. David says in another place. The Lord hath heard the voice of my weeping” (Ps. 6. 8). Specially are our eyes eloquent when they begin to fail with weariness and woe. A humble eye lifted up to heaven in silent prayer may flash such flame as shall melt the bolts which bar the entrance of vocal prayer, and so heaven shall be taken by storm with the artillery of tears. Blessed are the eyes that are strained in looking after God. The eyes of the Lord will see to it that such eyes do not actually fail. How much better to watch for the Lord with aching eyes than to have them sparkling at the glitter of vanity!

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

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

it fasten upon us and blacken us with miserable thoughts.

“Yet do I not forget thy statutes.” Here is the patience of the saints and the victory of faith. Blackened the man of God might be by falsehood, but the truth was in him, and he never gave it up. He was faithful to his King when he seemed deserted and left to the vilest uses. The promises came to his mind, and, what was still better evidence of his loyalty, the statutes were there too: he stuck to his duties as well as to his comforts. The worst circumstances cannot destroy the true believer’s hold upon his God. Grace is a living power which survives that which would suffocate all other forms of existence. Fire cannot consume it, and smoke cannot smother it. A man may be reduced to skin and bone, and all his comfort may be dried out of him, and yet he may hold fast his integrity and glorify his God. It is, however, no marvel that in such a case the eyes which are tormented with the smoke cry out for the Lord’s delivering hand, and the heart, heated and faint, longs for the divine salvation.

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

“How many are the days of thy servant?” I cannot hope to live long in such a condition; thou must come speedily to my rescue or I shall die. Shall all my short life be consumed in such destroying sorrows? The brevity of life is a good argument against the length of an affliction. Lord, since I am to live so short a time, be pleased to shorten my sorrow also. Perhaps the Psalmist means that his days seemed too many since they were spent in such distress. He half wished that they were ended, and therefore he asked in trouble, ***“How many are the days of thy servant?”*** Long life now seemed a calamity rather than a benediction. Like a hired servant, he had a certain term to serve, and he would not complain of what he had to bear; but still the time seemed long because his griefs were so heavy. No one knows the appointed number of our days except the Lord, and therefore to him the appeal is made that he would not prolong them beyond his servant’s strength. It cannot be the Lord’s mind that his own servant should always; be treated so unjustly; there must be an end to it; when would it be?

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

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

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

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

his path made dangerous by the craft of wanton malice.

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

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

“They persecute me wrongfully.” The fault lay with his persecutors, and neither with his God nor with himself. He had done no injury to anyone, nor acted otherwise than according to truth and justice; therefore he confidently appeals to his God, and cries,

“Help thou me.” This is a golden prayer, as precious as it is short. The words are few, but the meaning is full. Help was needed that the persecuted one might avoid the snare, might bear up under reproach, and might act so prudently as to baffle his foes. God’s help is our hope. Whoever may hurt us, it matters not so long as the Lord helps us; for if indeed the Lord help us, none can really hurt us. Many a time have these words been groaned out by troubled saints, for they are such as suit a thousand conditions of need, pain, distress, weakness, and sin. “Help, Lord,” will be a fitting prayer for youth and age, for labour and suffering, for life and death... No other help is sufficient, but God’s help is all-sufficient, and we cast ourselves upon it without fear.

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

“They had almost consumed me upon earth.” His foes had almost destroyed him so as to make him altogether fail. If they could they would have eaten him, or burned him alive; anything so that they could have made a full end of the good man. Evidently he had fallen under their power to a large extent, and they had so used that power that he was well-nigh consumed. He was almost gone from off the earth; but almost is not altogether, and so he escaped by the skin of his teeth. The lions are chained: they can rage no

further than our God permits. The Psalmist perceives the limit of their power: they could at the utmost only consume him “upon the earth:” they could touch his earthly life and earthly goods. Upon earth they almost ate him up, but he had an eternal portion which they could not even nibble at.

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

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

“Quicken me after thy lovingkindness.” Most wise, most blessed prayer! If we are revived in our own personal piety we shall be out of reach of our assailants. Our best protection from tempters and persecutors is more life. Lovingkindness itself cannot do us greater service than by making us to have life more abundantly. When we are quickened we are able to bear affliction, to baffle cunning, and to conquer sin. We look to the lovingkindness of God as the source of spiritual revival, and we entreat the Lord to quicken us, not according to our deserts, but after the boundless energy of his grace. What a blessed word is this **“lovingkindness!”** Take it to pieces, and admire its double force of love.

“So shall I keep the testimony of thy mouth.” If quickened by the Holy Ghost we shall keep God’s testimony by a holy character. We shall also be faithful to sound doctrine when the Spirit visits us and makes us faithful. None keep the word of the Lord’s mouth unless the word of the Lord’s mouth quickens them. We ought greatly to admire the spiritual prudence of the Psalmist, who does not so much pray for freedom from trial as for renewed life that he may be supported under it. When the inner life is vigorous all is

well. David prayed for a sound heart in the closing verse of the last octave, and here he seeks a revived heart; this is going to the root of the matter, by seeking that which is the most needful of all things. Lord, let it be heart-work with us, and let our hearts be right with thee.

Exposition of verses 89 to 96, Lamed

89. *For ever, O LORD, thy word is settled in heaven.*

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

89. *“For ever, O LORD, thy word is settled in heaven.”*

The strain is more joyful, for experience has given the sweet singer a comfortable knowledge of the word of the Lord, and this makes a glad theme. After tossing about on a sea of trouble, the Psalmist here leaps to shore and stands upon a rock. Jehovah's word is neither fickle nor uncertain; it is settled, determined, fixed, sure, immovable. Man's teachings change so often that there is never time for them to be settled; but the Lord's word is from of old the same, and will remain unchanged eternally. Some men are never happier than when they are unsettling everything and everybody; but God's mind is not with them. The power and glory of heaven have confirmed each sentence which the mouth of the Lord has spoken, and so confirmed it that to all eternity it must stand the same — settled in heaven, where nothing can reach it. In the former section David's soul fainted, but here the good man looks out of self

and perceives that the Lord fainteth not, neither is weary, neither is there any failure in his word.

The verse takes the form of an ascription of praise: the faithfulness and immutability of God are fit themes for holy song, and when we are tired with gazing upon the shifting scene of this life, the thought of the immutable promise fills our mouth with singing. God's purposes, promises, and precepts are all settled in his own mind, and none of them shall be disturbed. Covenant settlements will not be removed, however unsettled the thoughts of men may become; let us therefore settle it in our minds that we abide in the faith of our Jehovah as long as we have any being.

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

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

“Thou hast established the earth, and it abideth.” Nature is governed by fixed laws; the globe keeps its course by the divine command, and displays no erratic movements: the seasons observe their predestined order, the sea obeys the rule of ebb and flow, and all things else are marshalled in their appointed order. There is an analogy between the word of God and the works of God, and specially in this, that they are both of them constant, fixed, and unchangeable. God's word which established the world is the same as that which he has embodied in the Scriptures; by the word of the Lord were the heavens made, and specially by him who is emphatically THE WORD. When we see the world keeping its place, and all its laws abiding the same, we have herein assurance that the Lord will be faithful to his covenant, and will not allow the faith of his people to be put to shame. If the earth abideth, the

spiritual creation will abide; if God's word suffices to establish the world, surely it is enough for the establishment of the individual believer. There will come a time when the earth shall pass away, but, even then the Word of the Lord will stand: wherefore let us be steadfast, unmovable.

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

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

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

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

That word which has preserved the heavens and the earth also preserves the people of God in their time of trial. With that word we are charmed; it is a mine of delight to us. We take a double and treble delight in it, and derive a multiplied delight from it, and this

stands us in good stead when all other delights are taken from us. We should have felt ready to lie down and die of our grief's if the spiritual comforts of God's word had not uplifted us; but by their sustaining influence we have been borne above all the depressions and despairs which naturally grow out of severe affliction. Some of us can set our seal to this statement. Our affliction, if it had not been for divine grace, would have crushed us out of existence, so that we should have perished. In our darkest seasons nothing has kept us from desperation but the promise of the Lord: yea, at times nothing has stood between us and self-destruction save faith in the eternal word of God. When worn with pain until the brain has become dazed and the reason well-nigh extinguished, a sweet text has whispered to us its heart-cheering assurance, and our poor struggling mind has reposed upon the bosom of God. That which was our delight in prosperity has been our light in adversity; that which in the day kept us from presuming has in the night kept us from perishing. This verse contains a mournful supposition — **“unless;”** describes a horrible condition — **“perished in mine affliction;”** and implies a glorious deliverance; for he did not die, but he lived to proclaim the honours of the word of God.

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

When we have felt the quickening power of a precept we never can forget it. We may read it, learn it, repeat it, and think we have it, and yet it may slip out of our minds; but if it has once given us life, or renewed our life, there is no fear of its falling from our recollection. Experience teaches, and teaches effectually. How blessed a thing it is to have the precepts written on the heart with the golden pen of experience, and graven on the memory with the divine stylus of grace! Forgetfulness is a great evil in holy things; we see here the man of God fighting against it, and feeling sure of victory because he knew the life-giving energy of the word in his own soul. That which quickens the heart is sure to quicken the memory. It seems singular that he should ascribe quickening to the precepts, and yet it lies in them and in all the words of the Lord alike. It is to be noted that when the Lord raised the dead he

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

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

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

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

that he will certainly save us.

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

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

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

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

“I have seen an end of all perfection.” He had seen its limit, for it went but a little way; he had seen its evaporation under the trials of life, its detection under the searching glance of truth, its exposure by the confession of the penitent. There is no perfection

beneath the moon. Perfect men, in the absolute sense of the word, live only in a perfect world. Some men see no end to their own perfection, but this is because they are perfectly blind. The experienced believer has seen an end of all perfection in himself, in his brethren, in the best man's best works. It would be well if some who profess to be perfect could even see the beginning of perfection; for we fear they cannot have begun aright, or they would not talk so exceeding proudly. Is it not the beginning of perfection to lament your imperfection? There is no such thing as perfection in anything which is the work of man.

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

Exposition of verses 97 to 104, Mem

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

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

99. *I have more understanding than all my teachers: for thy*

testimonies are my meditation.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

“It is my meditation all the day” This was both the effect of his love to the law and the cause of that love. He meditated in God’s word because he loved it, and loved it the more because he meditated in it. He could not have enough of it, so ardently did he love it; all the day was not too long for his converse with it. His main prayer, his noonday thought, his evensong were all out of Holy Writ; yea, in his worldly business he still kept his mind saturated with the law of the Lord. It is said of some men that the more you know them the less you admire them; but the reverse is true of God’s word. Familiarity with the word of God breeds affection, and affection seeks yet greater familiarity. When **“thy law”** and **“my meditation”** are together all the day, the day grows

holy, devout, and happy, and the heart lives with God in love to his Word and delight therein. David turned away from all else but the word and will of the Lord, for in the preceding verse he tells us that he had seen an end of all perfection; but he turned in unto the law and tarried there the whole day of his life on earth, growing henceforth wiser and holier.

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

“*Thou through thy commandments hast made me wiser than mine enemies.*” The commandments were his book, but God was his teacher. The letter can make us knowing, but only the divine Spirit can make us wise. Wisdom is knowledge put to practical use. Wisdom comes to us; through obedience: “If any man will do his will he shall know of the doctrine.” We learn not only from promise, and doctrine, and sacred history, but also from precept and command: in fact, from the commandments we gather the most practical wisdom, and that which enables us best to cope with our adversaries. A holy life is the highest wisdom and the surest defence. Our enemies are renowned for subtlety, from the first father of them, the old serpent, down to the last cockatrice that has been hatched from the egg; and it would be vain for us to try to be a match with them in the craft and mystery of cunning; for the children of this world are in their generation wiser than the children of light. We must go to another school and learn of a different instructor, and then by uprightness we shall baffle fraud, by simple truth we shall vanquish deep-laid scheming, and by open candour we shall defeat slander.

A thoroughly straightforward man, devoid of all policy, is a terrible puzzle to diplomatists; they suspect him of a subtle duplicity through which they cannot see; while he, indifferent to their suspicions, holds on the even tenor of his way, and baffles all their arts. Yes, “honesty is the best policy.” He who is taught: of God has a practical wisdom such as malice cannot supply to the crafty; while harmless as a dove, he also exhibits more than the serpent’s wisdom.

“*For they are ever with me.*” He was always studying or

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

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

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

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

David does not hesitate to speak the truth in this place concerning himself, even though it is to his own honour, for he is quite innocent of self-consciousness. In speaking of his ***“understanding”*** he means to extol the law and the Lord, and not himself. There is not a grain of boasting in these bold expressions, but only a child-like desire to set forth the excellence of the Lord's word. He who knows the truths taught in the Bible will be guilty of no egotism if

he believes himself to be possessed of more important truth than all the agnostic professors in the universe.

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

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

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

There is no treasuring up the holy word, unless there is a casting out of all unholiness: if we keep the good word, we must let go the evil. David had zealously watched his steps and put a check upon his conduct — he had refrained his feet. No one evil way could entice him, for he knew that if he only went astray in one road he had practically left the way of righteousness; therefore he avoided every foul way. The by-paths were smooth and flowery, but he knew right well that they were evil, and so he turned his feet away, and plodded along the strait and thorny pathway which leads to God. It is a pleasure to look back upon self-conquests — ***“I have refrained,”*** and a greater delight still to know that we did this out of no mere desire to stand well with our fellows, but with the one

motive of keeping the law of the Lord. Sin avoided that obedience may be perfected is the essence of this verse; or it may be that the Psalmist would teach us that there is no real reverence for the book where there is not carefulness to avoid every transgression of its precepts. How can we as servants of the Lord keep his word if we do not keep our own works and words from bringing dishonour upon it?

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

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

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

“How sweet are thy words unto my taste!” He had not only heard the words of God, but fed upon them: they affected his palate as well as his ear: they had an inward effect on his taste as well as an outward effect on his hearing. God’s words are many and varied, and the whole of them make up what we call “the word:” David loved them each one, individually, and the whole of them as a whole, and therefore he tasted an indescribable sweetness in them.

He expresses the fact of their sweetness; but as he cannot express the degree of their sweetness he cries, "**How sweet!**" Being God's words they were divinely sweet to God's servant; he who put the sweetness into them had prepared the taste of his servant to discern and, enjoy it. David makes no distinction between promises and precepts, doctrines and threatenings; they are all included in God's words, and all are precious in his esteem. Oh for a deep love to all that the Lord has revealed, whatever form it may take!

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

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

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

"Therefore I hate every false way." Because he had understanding, and because of the divine precepts, he detested sin and falsehood. Every sin is a falsehood: we commit sin because we believe a lie, and in the end the flattering evil turns a liar to us, and

we find ourselves betrayed. True hearts are not indifferent about falsehood, they grow warm in indignation: as they love the truth, so they hate the lie. Saints have a universal horror of all that is untrue; they tolerate no falsehood or folly, they set their faces against all error of doctrine or wickedness of life. He who is a lover of one sin is in league with the whole army of sins; we must have neither truce nor parley with even one of these Amalekites, for the Lord hath war with them from generation to generation, and so must we. It is well to be a good hater. And what is that? A hater of no living being, but a hater of *“every false way.”* The way of self-will, of self-righteousness, of self-seeking, of worldliness, of pride, of unbelief, of hypocrisy, of lustfulness — these are all false ways and therefore not only to be shunned, but to be abhorred. This final verse of the strophe marks a great advance in character, and shows that the man of God is growing stronger, bolder, and happier than aforesaid. He has been taught of the Lord, so that he discerns between the precious and the vile, and while he loves the truth fervently he hates falsehood intensely. May all of us reach this state of discrimination and determination, so that we may greatly glorify God!

Exposition of verses 105 to 112, Nun

- 105.** *Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path.*
- 106.** *I have sworn, and I wilt perform it, that I will keep thy righteous judgments.*
- 107.** *I am afflicted very much: quicken me, O LORD, according unto thy word.*
- 108.** *Accept, I beseech thee, the freewill offerings of my mouth, O LORD, and teach me thy judgments.*
- 109.** *My soul is continually in my hand: yet do I not forget thy law.*
- 110.** *The wicked have laid a snare for me yet I erred not from thy precepts.*
- 111.** *Thy testimonies have I taken as an heritage for ever: for they are the rejoicing of my heart.*
- 112.** *I have inclined mine heart to perform thy statutes always, even unto the end.*

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

“Thy word is a lamp unto my feet.” We are walkers through the city of this world, and we are often called to go out into its darkness; let us never venture there without the light-giving word, lest we slip with our feet. Each man should use the word of God personally, practically, and habitually, that he may see his way, and see what lies in it. When darkness settles down upon all around me, the word of the Lord, like a flaming torch, reveals my way. Having no fixed lamps in eastern towns, in old time each passenger carried a lantern with him, that he might not fall into the open sewer, or stumble over the heaps of ordure which defiled the road.

This is a true picture of our path through this dark world: we should not know the way, or how to walk in it, if Scripture, like a blazing flambeau, did not reveal it. One of the most practical benefits of Holy Writ is guidance in the acts of daily life: it is not sent to astound us with its brilliance, but to guide us by its instruction. It is true the head needs illumination, but even more the feet need direction, else head and feet may both fall into a ditch. Happy is the man who personally appropriates God’s word, and practically uses it as his comfort and counsellor, — a lamp to his feet.

“And a light unto my path.” It is a lamp by night, a light by day, and a delight at all times. David guided his own steps by it, and also saw the difficulties of his road by its beams. He who walks in darkness is sure, sooner or later, to stumble; while: he who walks by the light of day, or by the lamp of night, stumbleth not, but keeps his uprightness. Ignorance is painful upon practical subjects; it breeds indecision and suspense, and these are uncomfortable: the word of God, by imparting heavenly knowledge, leads to decision, and when that is followed by determined resolution, as in this case, it brings with it great restfulness of heart.

This verse converses with God in adoring and yet familiar tones. Have we not something of like tenor to address to our heavenly Father? Note how much this verse is like the first verse of the first octave, and the first of the second and other octaves. The seconds also are often in unison.

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

Under the influence of the clear light of knowledge he had firmly made up his mind, and solemnly declared his resolve in the sight of God. Perhaps mistrusting his own fickle mind, he had pledged himself in sacred form to abide faithful to the determinations and decisions of his God. Whatever path might open before him, he was sworn to follow that only upon which the lamp of the word was shining. The Scriptures are God’s judgments or verdicts, upon great moral questions; these are all righteous, and hence righteous men should be resolved to keep them at all hazards, since it must always be right to do right. Experience shows that the less of covenanting and swearing men formally enter upon the better, and the genius of our Saviour’s teaching is against all unnecessary pledging and swearing; and yet under the gospel we ought to feel ourselves as much bound to obey the word of the Lord as if we had taken an oath so to do.

The bonds of love are not less sacred than the fetters of law. When a man has vowed, he must be careful to **“perform it;”** and when a man has not vowed in so many words to keep the Lord’s judgments, yet is he equally bound to do so by obligations which exist apart from any promise on our part — obligations founded in the eternal fitness of things, and confirmed by the abounding goodness of the Lord our God. Will not, every believer own that he is under bonds to the redeeming Lord to follow his example, and keep his words? Yes, the vows of the Lord are upon us, especially upon such as have made profession of discipleship, have been baptized into the thrice-holy name, have eaten of the consecrated memorials, and have spoken in the name of the Lord Jesus. We are enlisted, and sworn in, and are bound to be loyal soldiers all through the war. Thus, having taken the word into our hearts by a firm resolve to obey it, we have a lamp within our souls as well as in the Book, and our course will be light unto the end.

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

“I am afflicted very much.” According to the last verse, he had

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

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

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

“Accept, I beseech thee, the freewill offerings of my mouth, O Lord.” The living praise the living God, and therefore the

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

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

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

“My soul is continually in my hand.” He lived in the midst of danger. He had to be always fighting for existence — hiding in caves, or contending in battles. This is a very uncomfortable and trying state of affairs, and men are apt to think any expedient justifiable by which they can end such a condition: but David did not turn aside to find safety in sin, for he says,

“Yet do I not forget thy law.” They say that all things are fair in love and war; but the holy man thought not so: while he carried his

life in his hand, he also carried the law in his heart. No danger of body should make us endanger our souls by forgetting that which is right. Trouble makes many a man forget his duty, and it would have had the same effect upon the Psalmist if he had not obtained quickening (verse 107) and teaching (verse 108). In his memory of the Lord's law lay his safety; he was certainly not forgotten of his God, for his God was not forgotten of him. It is a special proof of grace when nothing can drive truth out of our thoughts, or holiness out of our lives. If we remember the law even when death stares us in the face, we may be well assured that the Lord is remembering us.

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

“The wicked have laid a snare far me.” Spiritual life is the scene of constant danger: the believer lives with his life in his hand, and meanwhile all seem plotting to take it from him, by cunning if they cannot by violence. We shall not find it an easy thing to live the life of the faithful. Wicked spirits and wicked men will leave no stone unturned for our destruction. When all other devices fail, and even hidden pits do not succeed, the wicked still persevere in their treacherous endeavours, and, becoming craftier still, they set snares for the victim of their hate. The smaller species of game are usually taken by this method, by gin, or trap, or net, or noose. Wicked men are quite indifferent as to the manner in which they can destroy the good man; they think no more of him than if he were a rabbit or a rat. Cunning and treachery are always the allies of malice, and everything like a generous or chivalrous feeling is unknown among the graceless, who treat the godly as if they were vermin to be exterminated.

When a man knows that he is thus assailed, he is too apt to become timorous, and rush upon some hasty device for deliverance, not without sin in the endeavour; but David calmly kept his way, and was able to write,

“Yet I erred not from thy precepts.” He was not snared, for he kept his eyes open, and kept near his God. He was not entrapped and robbed, for he followed the King's highway of holiness, where

God secures safety to every traveller. He did not err from the right, and he was not deterred from following it, because he referred to the Lord for guidance, and obtained it. If we err from the precepts, we part with the promises; if we get away from God's presence, we wander into the wilds where the fowlers freely spread their nets. From this verse let us learn to be on our guard, for we, too, have enemies both crafty and wicked. Hunters set their traps in the animals' usual runs, and our worst snares are laid in our own ways. By keeping to the ways of the Lord we shall escape the snares of our adversaries, for his ways are safe and free from treachery.

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

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

“For they are the rejoicing of my heart.” The gladness which had come to him through the word of the Lord had caused him to make an unalterable choice of it. All the parts; of Scripture had been pleasing to David, and were so still, and therefore he stuck to them, and meant to stick to them for ever. That which rejoices the heart is sure to be chosen and treasured. It is not the head-knowledge but the heart-experience which brings the joy.

In this verse, which is the seventh of its octave, we have reached the same sweetness as in the seventh of the last eight (103). It is worthy of observation that in several of the adjoining sevenths

delight is evident. How good a thing it is when experience ripens into joy, passing up through sorrow, prayer, conflict, hope, decision, and holy content into rejoicing. Joy fixes the spirit: when once a man's heart rejoices in the divine word, he greatly values it, and is therefore for ever united to it.

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

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

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

The fourth of six booklets.

