

ALEPH - TAU

**THE
GOLDEN
ALPHABET**

**PART ONE
PSALM 119:1-16**



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Prefatory Word

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

“A blessing is on them that are undefiled in the way; and walk in the law of Jehovah;

A blessing is on them that keep his testimonies, and seek him with their whole heart;

Also on them that do no wickedness, but walk in his ways.

A law hast thou given unto us, that we should diligently keep thy commandments.

Ah, Lord! that my ways were so directed that I might keep thy statutes!

And then shall I not be confounded, while I have: respect unto all thy commandments.

As for me, I will thank thee with an unfeigned heart, when I shall have learned thy righteous judgments.

An eye will I have unto thy statutes: O forsake me not utterly.”

This psalm is a wonderful composition. Its expressions are many as the waves, but its testimony is one as the sea. It deals all along with one subject only; but although it consists of a considerable number of verses, some of which are very similar to others, yet throughout its one hundred and seventy-six stanzas the self-same thought is not repeated: there is always a shade of difference, even

when the colour of the thought appears to be the same. Some have said that in it there is an absence of variety; but that is merely the observation of those who have not studied it. I have weighed each word, and looked at each syllable with lengthened meditation; and I bear witness that this sacred song has no tautology in it, but is charmingly varied from beginning to end. Its variety is that of a kaleidoscope: from a few objects innumerable permutations and combinations are produced. In the kaleidoscope you look once, and there is a strangely beautiful form: you shift the glass a very little, and another shape, equally delicate and beautiful, is before your eyes. So it is here. What you see is the same, and yet never the same it is the same truth, but it is always placed in a new light, put in a new connection, or in some way or other invested with freshness.

I do not believe that any subject other than a heavenly one would have allowed of such a psalm being written upon it; for the themes of this world are narrow and shallow. Neither could such a handling have been given even to a sacred subject by any mind less than divine; inspiration alone can account for the fullness and freshness of this psalm.

The best compositions of men are soon exhausted; they are cisterns, and not springing fountains. You enjoy them very much at the first acquaintance and you think you could hear them a hundred times over; but you could not: you soon find them wearisome. Very speedily a man eats too much honey: even children at length are cloyed with sweets. All human books grow stale after a time; but with the Word of God the desire to study it increases, while the more you know of it the less you think you know. The Book grows upon you: as you dive into its depths you have a fuller perception of the infinity which remains unexplored. You are still sighing to enjoy more of that which it is your bliss to taste. All this is true even of the psalm which is in itself nothing more than the eulogy of the divine testimony.

This wonderful psalm, from its great length, helps us to wonder at the immensity of Scripture. From its keeping to the same subject it helps us to adore the unity of Scripture, for it is but one.

Yet, from the many turns it gives to its one thought, it helps us to see the variety of Scripture. How manifold are the words and thoughts of God are in his Word, just as in creation, the wonders of his skill are displayed in many ways.

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

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

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

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

Psalm 119.

There is no special title to this Psalm, neither is any author's name mentioned. It is THE LONGEST PSALM, and this is a sufficiently distinctive name for it. It equals in bulk twenty-two psalms of the average length of the Songs of Degrees. Nor is it long only; for it equally excels in breadth of thought, depth of

meaning, and height of fervour. It is like the celestial city which lieth four-square, and the height and the breadth of it are equal. Many superficial readers have imagined that it harps upon one string, and abounds in pious repetitions and redundancies; but this arises from the shallowness of the reader's own mind: those who have studied this divine hymn, and carefully noted each line of it, are amazed at the variety and profundity of the thought. Using only a few words, the writer has produced permutations and combinations of meaning' which display his holy familiarity with his subject, and the sanctified ingenuity of his mind. He never repeats himself; for if the same sentiment recurs it is placed in a fresh connection and so exhibits another interesting shade of meaning. The more one studies it the fresher it becomes. As those who drink the Wile water like it better every time they take a draught, so does this Psalm become the fuller and fascinating the oftener you turn to it? It contains no idle word; the grapes of this cluster are almost to bursting full with the new wine of the kingdom. The more you look into this mirror of a gracious heart the more you will see in it. Placid on the surface as the sea of glass before the eternal throne, it yet contains within its depths an ocean of fire, and those who devoutly gaze into it shall not only see the brightness, but feel the glow of the sacred flame. It is loaded with holy sense, and is as weighty as it is bulky. Again and again have we cried while studying it, "Oh the depths!" Yet these depths are hidden beneath an apparent simplicity, as Augustine has well and wisely said, and this makes the exposition all the more difficult. Its obscurity is hidden beneath a veil of light, and hence only those discover it who are in thorough earnest, not only to look on the word, but, like the angels, to look into it.

The Psalm is alphabetical. Eight stanzas commence with one letter, and then another eight with the next letter, and so the whole Psalm proceeds by octonaries quite through the twenty-two letters of the Hebrew alphabet. Besides which, there are multitudes of oppositions of sense; and others of those structural formalities with which the oriental mind is pleased, — formalities very similar to those in which our older poets indulged.

The Holy Spirit thus deigned to speak to men in forms which were attractive to the attention and helpful to the memory. He is often plain or elegant in his manner, but he does not disdain to be quaint or formal if thereby his design of instruction can be the more surely reached. He does not despise even contracted and artificial modes of speech, if by their use he can fix his teaching upon the mind. Isaac Taylor has worthily set forth the lesson of this fact: — “In the strictest sense this composition is conditioned; nevertheless in the highest sense is it an utterance of spiritual life; and in thus finding these seemingly opposed elements, intimately commingled as they are throughout this Psalm, a lesson full of meaning is silently conveyed to those who shall receive it — that the conveyance of the things of God to the human spirit is in no way damaged or impeded, much less is it deflected or vitiated, by its subjugation to those modes of utterance which most of all bespeak their adaptation to the infancy and the childlike capacity of the recipient.”

The fashion among modern writers is, as far as possible, to take every one of the Psalms from David. As the critics of this school are usually unsound in doctrine and unspiritual in tone, we gravitate in the opposite direction, from a natural suspicion of everything which comes from so unsatisfactory a quarter. We believe that David wrote this Psalm. It is David in tone and expression, and it tallies with David’s experience in many interesting points. In our youth our teacher called it “David’s pocket-book,” and we incline to the opinion then expressed, that here we have the royal diary written at various times throughout a long life. No, we cannot give up this Psalm to the enemy. “This is David’s spoil.” After long reading an author, one gets to know his style, and a measure of discernment is acquired by which his composition is detected even if his name be concealed: we feel a kind of critical certainty that the hand of David is in this thing, yea, that it is altogether his own.

The one theme of this Psalm is the word of the Lord. The Psalmist sets his subject in many lights, and treats of it in divers ways, but he seldom omits to mention the word of the Lord in each

verse under some one or other of the many names by which he knows it; and even if the name be not there, the subject is still heartily pursued in every stanza. He who wrote this wonderful song was saturated with those books of Scripture which he possessed. Andrew Bonar tells of a simple Christian in a farmhouse who had meditated the Bible through three times. This is precisely what this Psalmist had done, — he had gone past reading into meditation. Like Luther, David had shaken every fruit-tree in God's garden, and gathered golden fruit there from. "The most," says Martin Boos, "read their Bibles like cows that stand in the thick grass, and trample under their feet the finest flowers and herbs." It is to be feared that we too often do the like. This is a miserable way of treating the pages of inspiration. May the Lord prevent us from repeating that sin while reading this priceless Psalm?

There is an evident growth in the subject-matter. The earlier verses are of such a character as to lend themselves to the hypothesis that the author was a young man, while many of the later passages could only have suggested themselves to age and wisdom. In every portion, however, it is the fruit of deep experience, careful observation, and earnest meditation. If David did not write it, there must have lived another believer of exactly the same order, of mind as David, and he must have addicted himself to psalmody with equal ardour, and have been an equally hearty lover of Holy Writ.

Our best improvement of this sacred composition will come through getting our minds into intense sympathy with its subject. In order to this, we might do well to commit it to memory. Philip Henry's daughter wrote in her diary, "I have of late taken some pains to learn by heart Psalm 119, and have made some progress therein." She was a sensible, godly woman.

Having rehearsed the subject-matter of this golden Psalm, we should still further consider the fullness, certainty, clearness, and sweetness of the word of God, since by such reflections we are likely to be stirred up to a warm affection for it. What favoured beings are those to whom the Eternal God has written a letter in

his own hand and style! What ardour of devotion, what diligence of composition, can produce a worthy eulogium for the divine testimonies! If ever one such has fallen from the pen of man it is this 119th Psalm, which might well be called the holy soul's soliloquy before an open Bible.

This sacred ode is a little Bible, the Scriptures condensed, a mass of Bibline, Holy Writ rewritten in holy emotions and actions. The Germans called it "The Christian's golden A B C of the praise, love, power, and use of the Word of God." Blessed are they who can read and understand these saintly aphorisms: they shall find golden apples in this true Hesperides, and come to reckon that this Psalm, like the whole Scripture which it praises, is a pearl island, or, better still, a garden of sweet flowers,

The study of this sacred song has often proved helpful to holy men. Henry Martyn mentions it again and again in his diary; as for instance — "experienced a solemn gladness in learning this part, 'MEM,' of the 119th Psalm." William Wilberforce makes this record during a time of political trouble: "Walked from Hyde Park Corner repeating the 119th Psalm in great comfort." Pascal, in the reading of this holy song, seemed to pass out of himself in holy rapture.

May those who shall read the Psalm, accepting, the help of our exposition, feel their hearts burn within them! To this end, at the very outset let our prayer ascend to God that his Holy Spirit may rest upon us while we devoutly peruse each booklet.

Exposition of verses 1 to 8, Aleph

- 1. Blessed are the undefiled in the way, who walk in the law of the LORD.**
- 2. Blessed are they that keep his testimonies, and that seek him with the whole heart.**
- 3. They also do no iniquity: they walk in his ways.**
- 4. Thou hast commanded us to keep thy precepts diligently.**
- 5. O that my ways were directed to keep thy statutes!**
- 6. Then shall I not be ashamed, when I have respect unto all thy commandments.**

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

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

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

Lovers of God's Holy Word are blessed, because they are preserved from defilement: (verse 1), because they are made practically holy (verses 2 and 3), and are led to follow after God sincerely and intensely (verse 2). It is made clear that holy walking must be desirable, because God commands it (verse 4); therefore the pious soul prays for it: (verse 5), and feels that its comfort and courage must depend upon obtaining it (verse 6). In the prospect of answered prayer, yea, while the prayer is being answered, the heart is full of thankfulness (verse 7), and is fixed in solemn resolve not to miss the blessing if the Lord will give enabling grace (verse 8).

The changes are rung upon the words "way" — "undefiled in the way" "walk in his ways," "O that my ways were directed." "keep" — "keep his testimonies," "keep thy precepts diligently," "directed to keep," "I will keep:" and "walk" — "walk in the law," "walk in his ways." Yet there is no tautology; nor is the same thought repeated, though to the careless reader it may seem so.

The change from statements about others and about the Lord to more personal dealing with God begins in the fourth verse, and becomes more clear as we advance, till in the later verses the communion becomes most intense and soul moving. "I will praise thee. I will keep thy statutes. O forsake me not utterly." O that every reader may feel the glow of personal devotion while studying this first section of the psalm!

1. ***“Blessed are the undefiled in the way, who walk in the law of the Lord.”***

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

True religion is always practical, for it does not permit us to delight ourselves in a perfect rule without exciting in us a longing to be conformed to that rule in our daily conduct. A blessing belongs to those who hear and read and understand the word of the Lord: yet is it a far greater blessing; to be actually obedient to it, and to carry out in our walk and conversation what we learn in our searching of the Scriptures. Purity in our *way* and walk is the truest blessed-ness.

This first verse is not only a preface to the whole psalm, but it may also be regarded as the text upon which the rest is a discourse. It is similar to the benediction of the first psalm, which is set in the forefront of the entire book: there is a likeness between this 119th Psalm and the Psalter, and this is one point of it, that it begins with a benediction. In this, too, we see some foreshadowing’s of the Son of David, who began his great sermon as David began his great psalm. It is well to open our mouth with blessings. When we cannot bestow them, we can show the way of obtaining them, and

even if we do not yet possess them ourselves, it may be profitable to contemplate them, that our desires may be excited, and our souls moved to seek after them. Lord, if I am not yet so blessed as to be among the undefiled in thy way, yet I will think much of the happiness which these enjoy, and set it before me as my life's ambition.

As David thus begins his psalm, so should young men begin their lives, so should new converts commence their profession, so should all Christians begin every day. Settle it in your hearts as a first postulate and sure rule of Practical science, that holiness is happiness, and that it is our wisdom first to seek the kingdom of God and his righteousness. Well begun is half done? To start with a true idea of blessedness is beyond measure important. Man began with being blessed in his innocence, and if our fallen race is ever to be blessed again, it must find blessedness where it lost it at the beginning, namely, in conformity to the command of the Lord.

“The undefiled in the way.” They are in the way, the right way, the way, of the Lord, and they keep that way, walking with holy carefulness, and washing their feet daily, lest they be defiled by contact with the world. They enjoy great blessedness in their own souls; indeed, they have a foretaste of heaven, where the blessedness lieth much in being absolutely undefiled; and could they continue utterly and altogether without defilement, doubtless they would have the days of heaven upon earth. Outward evil would little hurt us if we were entirely rid of the evil of sin, an attainment which, with the best of us, lies still in the region of desire, and is not yet fully reached, though we have so clear a view of it that we see it to be blessedness itself; and therefore we eagerly press towards it. He, whose life is in a gospel sense undefiled, is blessed, because he could never have reached this point if a thousand blessings had not already been bestowed on him. By nature we are defiled and out of the way, and we must therefore have been washed in the atoning blood to remove defilement, and we must have been converted by the power of the Holy Ghost, or we should not have been turned into the way of peace, nor be undefiled in it. Nor is this all; for the continual

power of grace is needed to keep a believer in the right way, and to preserve him from pollution. All the blessings of the covenant must have been in a measure poured, upon those who from day to day have been enabled to perfect holiness in the fear of the Lord. Their way is the evidence of their being the blessed of the Lord.

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

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

What blessedness awaits those who follow the Lamb whithersoever he goeth, and are preserved from the evil which is in the world through lust? These shall be the envy of all mankind “in that day.” Though now they despise them as precise fanatics and Puritans, the most prosperous of sinners shall then wish that

they could change places with them. O my soul, seek thou thy blessedness in following hard after thy *Lord*, who was holy, harmless, undefiled; for there hast thou found peace hitherto, and there wilt thou find it for ever.

“Who walk in the law of the Lord?” In them is found habitual holiness. Their walk, their common everyday life: is obedience unto the Lord. They live by rule that rule the command of the Lord God. Whether they eat or drink, or whatsoever they do, they do all in the name of their great Master and Exemplar. To them religion is nothing out of the way, it is their everyday walk; it moulds their common actions as well as their special devotions. This ensures blessedness. He who walks in God’s law walks in God’s company, and he must be blessed; he has God’s smile, God’s strength, God’s secret with him, and how can he be otherwise than blessed?

The holy life is a walk, a steady progress, a quiet advance, a lasting continuance. Enoch walked with God. Good men always long to be better, and hence they go forward. Good men are never idle, and hence they do not lie down or loiter, but they are still walking onward to their desired end. They are not hurried, and worried, and flurried, and so they keep the even tenor of their way, walking steadily towards heaven; and they are not in perplexity as to how to conduct themselves, for they have a perfect rule, which they are happy to walk by. The law of the Lord is not irksome to them; its commandments are not grievous, and its restrictions are not slavish in their esteem. It does not appear to them to be an impossible law, theoretically admirable, but practically absurd; but they walk by it and in it. They do not consult it now and then as a sort of rectifier of their wanderings, but they use it as a chart for their daily sailing, a map of the road for their life-journey. Nor do they ever regret that they have entered upon the path of obedience, else they would leave it, and that without difficulty, for a thousand temptations offer them opportunity to return; their continued walk in the law of the Lord is their best testimony to the blessedness of such a condition of life. Yes, they are blessed even now. The Psalmist himself bore witness to the fact: he had tried and proved it, and wrote it down as a fact which defied all denial. Here it

stands in the forefront of David's *magnum opus*, written on the topmost line of his greatest Psalm — "BLESSED ARE THEY WHO WALK IN THE LAW OF THE LORD." Rough may be the way, stern the rule, hard the discipline — all these we know, and more — but a thousand heaped-up blessednesses are still found in godly living, for which we bless the Lord.

We have in this verse blessed persons who enjoy five blessed things: a blessed way, blessed purity, a blessed law, given by a blessed Lord, and a blessed walk therein; to which we may add the blessed testimony of the Holy Ghost given in this very passage that they are in very deed the blessed of the Lord.

The blessedness which is thus set before us we must aim at, but we must not think to obtain it without earnest effort. David has a great deal to say about it; his discourse in this Psalm is long and solemn, and it is a hint to us that the way of perfect obedience is not learned in a day; there must be precept upon precept, line upon line, and after efforts long enough to be compared with the 176 verses of this Psalm, we may still have to cry, "I have gone astray like a lost sheep; seek thy servant; for I do not forget thy commandments."

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

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

"*Blessed are they that keep his testimonies.*" What! A second blessing? Yes, they are doubly blessed whose outward life is supported by an inward zeal for God's glory. In the first verse we

had an undefiled way, and it was taken for granted that the purity in the way was not mere surface work, but was attended by the inward truth and life which comes of divine grace. Here that which was implied is expressed. Blessedness is ascribed to those who treasure up the testimonies of the Lord; in which is implied that they search the Scriptures, that they come to an understanding of them, that they love them, and then that they continue the practice of them. We must first get a thing before we can keep it. In order to keep it well we must get a firm grip of it: we cannot keep in the heart that which we have not heartily embraced by the affections. God's word is his witness or testimony to grand and important truths which concern himself and our relation to him: this we should desire to know; knowing it, we should believe it; believing it, we should love it; and loving it, we should hold it fast against all comers. There is a doctrinal keeping of the word when we are ready to die for its defence and a practical keeping of it when we actually live under its power. Revealed truth is precious as diamonds, and should be kept or treasured up in the memory and in the heart as jewels in a casket, or as the law was kept in the ark; this, however, is not enough; for it is meant for practical use, and therefore it must be kept or followed, as men keep to a path, or to a line of business. If we keep God's testimonies they will keep us; they will keep us right in opinion, comfortable in spirit, holy in conversation, and hopeful in expectation. If they were ever worth having, and no thoughtful person will question that, then they are worth keeping; their designed effect does not come through a temporary seizure of them, but by a persevering keeping of them: "in keeping of them there is great reward."

We are bound to keep with all care the word of God, because it is *his* testimonies, He gave them to us, but they are still his own. We are to keep them as a watchman guards his master's house, as a steward husbands his lord's goods, as a shepherd keeps his employer's flock. We shall have to give an account, for we are put in trust with the gospel, and woe to us if we be found unfaithful. We cannot fight a good fight, nor finish our course, unless we keep the faith! To this end the *Lord* must keep us: only those who

are kept by the power of God unto salvation will ever be able to keep his testimonies. What a blessedness is therefore evidenced and testified by a careful belief in God's word, and a continual obedience thereunto as God has blessed them, is blessing them, and will bless them for ever. That blessedness which David saw in others he realized for himself, for in verse 168 he says, "I have kept thy precepts and thy testimonies," and in verses 54 to 56 he traces his joyful songs and happy memories to this same keeping of the law, and he confesses, "This I had because I kept thy precepts." Doctrines which we teach to others we should experience for ourselves.

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

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

God is not truly sought by the cold researches of the brain: we must seek him with the heart. Love reveals itself to love: God manifests his heart to the heart of his people. It is in vain that we

endeavour to comprehend him by reason; we must apprehend him by affection. But the heart must not be divided with many objects if the Lord is to be sought by us. God is one, and we shall not know him till our heart is one. A broken heart need not be distressed at this, for no heart is so whole in its seekings after God as a heart which is broken, whereof every fragment sighs and cries after the great Father's face. It is the divided heart which the doctrine of the text censures, and, strange to say, in scriptural phraseology, a heart may be divided and not broken, and it may be broken but not divided; and yet again it may be broken and be whole, and it never can be whole until it is broken. When our whole heart seeks the holy God in Christ Jesus it has come to him of whom it is written, "As many as touched him were made perfectly whole."

That which the Psalmist admires in this verse he claims in the tenth, where he says, "With my whole heart have I sought thee." It is well when admiration of a virtue leads to the attainment of it. Those who do not believe in the blessedness of seeking the Lord will not be likely to arouse their hearts to the pursuit; but he who calls another blessed because of the grace which he sees in him is on the way to gaining the same grace for himself.

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

***"To those who fall, how kind thou art!
How good to those who seek!
But what to those who find? Ah! This
Nor tongue nor pen can show:
The love of Jesus — what it is,
None but his loved ones know."***

3. *"They also do no iniquity: they walk in his ways."*

"They also do no iniquity." Blessed indeed would those men be of whom this could be asserted without reserve and without explanation: we shall have reached the region of pure blessedness when we altogether cease from sin. Those who follow the word of God do no iniquity; the rule is perfect, and if it be constantly

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

"They walk in his ways." They attend not only to the great main highway of the law, but to the smaller paths of the particular precepts. As they will perpetrate no sin of commission, so do they labour to be free from every sin of omission? It is not enough to them to be blameless, they wish also to be actively righteous. A hermit may escape into solitude that he may do no iniquity, but a saint lives in society that he may serve his God by walking in his ways. We must be positively as well as negatively right: we shall not long keep the second unless we attend to the first; for men will be walking one way or another, and if they do not follow the path of God's law they will soon do iniquity. The surest way to abstain from evil is to be fully occupied in doing good. This verse describes believers as they exist among us: although they have their faults and infirmities, yet they hate evil, and will not permit themselves to do it; they love the ways of truth, right and true godliness, and habitually they walk therein. They do not claim to be absolutely perfect except in their desires, and there they are pure indeed; for they pant to be kept from all sin, and to be led into all holiness. Could they but always walk according to the desire of their renewed hearts, they would follow the Lord Jesus in every thought, and word, and deed of life: yea, their whole being

would be incarnate holiness.

4. “*Thou hast commanded us to keep thy precepts diligently.*”

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

Some are diligent in superstition and will worship; be it ours to be diligent in keeping God’s precepts. It is of no use travelling fast if we are not in the right road. Men have been diligent in a losing business, and the more they have traded the more they have lost: this is bad enough in commerce; we cannot afford to have it so in our religion. God has not commanded us to be diligent in *making* precepts, but in *keeping* them. Some bind yokes upon their own necks, and make bonds and rules for others: but the wise course is to be satisfied with the rules of holy Scripture, and to strive to keep them all, in all places, towards all men, and in all respects. If we do not this, we may become eminent in our own religion, but

we shall not have kept the command of God, nor shall we be accepted of him.

The Psalmist began with the third person: “Blessed are the undefiled.” He is now coming near home, and has already reached the first person plural, according to our version: **“*Thou hast commanded us.*”** We shall soon hear him crying out personally and for himself: “O that my ways were directed!” As the heart glows with love to holiness, we long to have a personal interest in it. The word of God is a heart-affecting book, and when we begin to sing its praises it soon comes home to us, and sets us praying to be ourselves conformed to its teachings. Would not the reader do well to pause here, and by devout meditation impress his own heart with the divine authority of the Scriptures, that so he may devote himself personally to the careful, prayerful, constant, punctual, and cheerful keeping of the precepts of the Lord?

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

Divine commands should direct us in the subject of our prayers. We cannot of ourselves keep God’s statutes as he would have them kept, and yet we long to do so: what resort have we but prayer? We must ask the Lord to work our works in us, or we shall never work out his commandments. This verse is a sigh of regret because the Psalmist feels that he has not kept the precepts diligently, it is a cry of weakness appealing for help to one who can aid, it is a request of bewilderment from one who has lost his way and would fain be directed in it, and it is a petition of faith from one who loves God and trusts in him for grace.

Our ways are by nature opposed to the way of God, and must be turned by the Lord’s direction in another direction from that which they originally take, or they will lead us down to destruction. God can direct the mind and will without violating our free agency, and he will do so in answer to prayer; in fact, he has begun the work already in those who are heartily praying after the fashion of this verse. It is for present holiness that the desire arises in the heart: oh, that it were so now with me! But future persevering holiness is also meant; for he longs for grace to keep henceforth and for ever

the statutes of the Lord.

The sigh of the text is really a prayer, though it does not exactly take that form. Desires and longings are of the essence of supplication, and it little matters what shape they take. ***“O that”*** is as acceptable a prayer as **“Our Father.”**

One would hardly have expected a prayer for direction; rather should we have looked for a petition for enabling. Can we not direct ourselves? What if we cannot row, we can steer. The Psalmist herein confesses that even for the smallest part of his duty he felt unable without grace. He longed for the Lord to influence his will, as well as to strengthen his hands. We want a rod to point out the way as much as a staff to support us in it.

The longing of the text is prompted by admiration of the blessedness of holiness, by a contemplation of the righteous man’s beauty of character, and by a reverent awe of the command of God. It is a personal application to the writer’s own case of the truths which he had been considering. ***“O that my ways were directed to keep thy statutes!”*** It were well if all who hear the word would copy this example and turn all that they hear into prayer. We should have more keepers of the statutes if we had more who sigh and cry after the grace which alone can keep them from wandering.

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

“Then shall I not be ashamed.” He had known shame, and here he rejoices in the prospect of being freed from it. Sin brings shame, and when sin is gone, the reason for being ashamed is banished. What a deliverance this is; for to some men death is preferable to shame!

“When I have respect unto all thy commandments.” When he respects God he shall respect himself and be respected. Whenever we err we prepare ourselves for confusion of face and sinking of heart: if no one else is ashamed of me, I shall be ashamed of myself if I do iniquity. Our first parents never knew shame till they made the acquaintance of the old serpent, and it never left

them till their gracious God had covered them with sacrificial skins. Disobedience made them naked and ashamed. We, ourselves, will always have cause, for shame till every sin is vanquished, and every duty is observed. When we pay a continual and universal respect to the will of the Lord, then we shall be able to look ourselves in the face in the looking glass of the law, and we shall not blush at the sight of men or devils, however eager their malice may be to lay somewhat to our charge.

Many suffer from excessive diffidence, and this verse suggests a cure. An abiding sense of duty will make us bold, we shall be afraid to be afraid. No shame in the presence of man will hinder us when the fear of God has taken full possession of our minds. When we are on the king's highway by daylight, and are engaged upon royal business, we need ask no man's leave. It would be a dishonour to a king to be ashamed of his livery and his service; no such shame should ever crimson the cheek of a Christian, nor will it if he has due reverence for the Lord his God. There is nothing to be ashamed of in a holy life: a man may be ashamed of his pride, ashamed of his wealth, ashamed of his own children; but he will never be ashamed of having in all things regarded the will of the Lord his God.

It is worthy of remark that David promises himself no immunity from shame till he has carefully paid homage to all the precepts. Mind that word "*all,*" and leave not one command out of your respect. Partial obedience still leaves us liable to be called to account for those commands which we have neglected. A man may have a thousand virtues, and yet a single failing may cover him with shame.

To a poor sinner who is buried in despair, it may seem a very unlikely thing that he should ever be delivered from shame. He blushes, and is confounded, and feels that he can never lift up his face again. Let him read these words: "Then shall I not be ashamed." David is not dreaming, nor picturing an impossible case. Be assured, dear friend, that the Holy Spirit can renew in you the image of God, so that you shall yet look up without fear. O for sanctification, to direct us in God's way; for then shall we have

boldness both towards God and his people, and shall no more crimson with confusion.

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

*“Then shall my heart have inward joy,
And keep my face from shames
When all thy statutes I obey,
And honour all thy name.”*

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

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

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

“When I shall have learned thy righteous judgments.” We must learn to praise, learn that we may praise, and praise when we have learned. If we are ever to learn the Lord must teach us, and especially upon such a subject as his judgments, for they are a great deep. While these are passing before our eyes, and we are

learning from them, we ought to praise God; for the original is not, “*when I have learned,*” but, “*in my learning.*” While yet I am a scholar I will be a chorister: my upright heart shall praise thine uprightness, my purified judgment shall admire thy judgments. God’s providence is a book full of teaching, and to those: whose hearts are right it is a music-book, out of which they chant to Jehovah’s praise. God’s word is full of the record of his righteous providences, and as we read it we feel compelled to burst forth into expressions of holy delight and ardent praise. When we both read of God’s judgments and become joyful partakers in them, we are doubly moved to song — song in which there is neither formality, nor hypocrisy, nor lukewarmness; for the heart is upright in the presentation of its praise.

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

“*I will keep thy statutes.*” A calm resolve. When praise calms down: into solid resolution it is well with the soul. Zeal which spends itself in singing, and leaves no practical residuum of holy living, is little worth: “*I will praise*” should be coupled with “*I will keep.*” This firm resolve is by no means boastful, like Peter’s “*though I should die with thee, yet will I not deny thee;*” for it is followed by a humble prayer for divine help,

“*O forsake me not utterly.*” Feeling his own incapacity, he trembles lest he should be left to himself, and this fear is increased by the horror which he has of falling into sin. The “*I will keep:*” sounds rightly enough now that the humble cry is heard with it. This is a happy amalgam: resolution and dependence We meet with those who to all appearance humbly pray, but there is no force of character, no decision in them, and consequently the pleading of the closet is not embodied in the life: on the other hand, we meet with abundance of resolve attended with an entire absence of dependence upon God, and this makes as poor a character as the former. The Lord grant us to have such a blending of excellences that we may be “perfect and entire, wanting nothing.”

This prayer is one which is certain to be heard; for assuredly it

must be highly pleasing to God to see a man set upon obeying his will, and therefore it must be most agreeable to him to be present with such a person, and to help him in his endeavours. How can he forsake one who does not forsake his law?

The peculiar dread which tinges this prayer with a sombre hue is the fear of utter forsaking. Well may the soul cry out against such a calamity. To be left, that we may discover our weakness, is a sufficient trial: to be altogether forsaken would be ruin and death. Hiding the face in a little wrath for a moment brings us very low: an absolute desertion would plunge us ultimately in the lowest hell. But the Lord never has utterly forsaken his servants, and he never will, blessed be his name. If we long to keep his statutes he will keep us; yea, his grace will keep us keeping his law.

There is rather a sharp descent from the mount of benediction, with which the first verse began, to the almost wail of this eighth verse, yet this is spiritually and experimentally a decided and gracious growth; for from admiration of goodness we have come to a burning longing after God, pining after communion with him, and an intense horror lest it should not be enjoyed. The sigh of verse 5 is now supplanted by an actual prayer from the depths of a heart conscious of its undesert, and sensible of its entire dependence upon divine love. The two “I wills” — ***“I will praise thee,”*** and ***“I will keep thy statutes”*** — needed to be seasoned with some such lowly petition, or it might have been thought that the good man’s dependence was in some degree fixed upon his own determination. He presents his resolutions like a sacrifice, but he cries to heaven for the fire, to will is present with him, but he cannot perform that which he would unless the Lord will abide with him.

This last verse of the first octave has a link with the first of the next in this fashion: Lord, do not forsake me, for wherewith shall I cleanse my way if thou be gone from me, and thy law ceases to have power over me.

Exposition of verses 9 to 16, Beth

9. *Wherewithal shall a young man cleanse his way? by taking*

heed thereto according to thy word.

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

11. Thy word have I hid in mine heart, that I might not sin against thee.

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

13. With my lips have I declared all the judgments of thy mouth.

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

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

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

These verses commence at the beginning of life. Though written by an old man, they were written for all young men. Only he who begins with God in the greenness of youth will be able to write thus experimentally in the ripeness of age. No sooner has David introduced his subject with one octave of verses, but he must be looking after young men in the next set of eight stanzas. How much he thought of youthful piety. In the Hebrew each verse in this section begins with B. If thoughts upon the Blessed Way make up his A, then thoughts upon Blessed Young Men shall fill up the next letter. O to be early with God! To give him the dew of the day of life is to make the most of life.

9. “Wherewithal shall a young man cleanse his way? by taking heed thereto according to thy word.”

“Wherewithal shall a young man cleanse his way?” How shall he become and remain practically holy? He is but a young man, full of hot passions, and poor in knowledge and experience; how shall he get right, and keep right? Never was there a more important question for any man; never was there a fitter time for asking it than at the commencement of life. It is by no means an easy task which the prudent young man sets before himself. He wishes to choose a clean way, to be himself clean in it, to cleanse

it of any foulness which may arise in the future, and to end by showing a clear course from the first step to the last; but, alas! His way is already unclean by actual sin which he has already committed, and he himself has already within his nature a tendency towards that which defileth. Here, then, is the difficulty; first, of beginning aright; next, of being always able to know and choose the right, and of continuing in the right till perfection is ultimately reached: this is hard for any man, how shall a youth accomplish it? The way, or life, of a man has to be cleansed from the sins of his youth behind him, and kept clear of the sins which temptation will place before him: this is the work, this is the difficulty.

No nobler ambition can lie before a youth, none to which he is called by so sure a calling; but none in which greater difficulties can be found. Let him not, however, shrink from the glorious enterprise of living a pure and gracious life; rather let him inquire the way by which all obstacles may be overcome. Let him not think that he knows the road to easy victory, nor dream that he can keep himself by his own wisdom; he will do well to follow the Psalmist, and become an earnest inquirer asking how he may cleanse his way. Let him become a practical disciple of the holy God, who alone can teach him how to overcome the world, the flesh, and the devil, that trinity of defilers by whom many a hopeful life has been spoiled. He is young and unaccustomed to the road, let him not be ashamed often to inquire his way of him who is so ready and so able: to instruct him in it.

Our *“way”* is a subject which concerns us deeply, and it is far better to inquire about it than to speculate upon mysterious themes which rather puzzle than enlighten the mind. Among all the questions which a young man asks, and they are many, let this be the first and chief: *“Wherewithal shall I cleanse my way?”* This is a question suggested by common sense, and pressed home by daily occurrences; but it is not to be answered by unaided reason, nor, when answered, can the directions be carried out by unsupported human power. It is ours to ask the question, it is God’s to give the answer and enable us to carry it out.

“By taking heed thereto according to thy word:” Young man, the Bible must be your chart, and you must exercise great watchfulness that your way may be according to its directions. You must take heed to your daily life as well as study your Bible, and you must study your Bible that you may take heed to your daily life. With the greatest care a man will go astray if his map misleads him; but with the most accurate map he will still lose his road if he does not take heed to it. The narrow way was never hit upon by chance; neither did any heedless man ever lead a holy life. We can sin without thought, we have only to neglect the great salvation and ruin our souls; but to obey the Lord and walk uprightly will need all our heart and soul and mind. Let the careless remember this.

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

shall reach the benediction of the first verse of the psalm, which suggested the Psalmist's inquiry, and awakened his desires.

Note how the first section of eight verses has for its first verse, "*Blessed* are the undefiled in the way," and the second section runs parallel to it, with the question, "*Wherewithal shall a young man cleanse his way?*" The blessedness which is set before us in a conditional promise should be practically sought for in the way appointed. The Lord saith, "*For* this will I be inquired of by the house of Israel to do it for them."

The sooner we avail ourselves of a promise of God the better, especially as our early days enjoy peculiar encouragement! For Wisdom hath said, "*They* that seek me early shall find me." It is a pity to miss for a year, or even a day or an hour, the blessedness which belongs to holiness.

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

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

It is pleasant to see how the writer's heart turns distinctly and directly to God. He had been considering an important truth in the preceding verse, but here he so powerfully feels the presence of his God that he speaks to him, and prays to him, as to one who is near. A true heart cannot long live without fellowship with God.

His petition is founded on his life's purpose: he is seeking the Lord, and he prays the Lord to prevent his going astray in or from his search. It is by obedience that we follow after God: hence the prayer,

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

Two things may be very alike and yet altogether different: saints are “strangers” — “I am a stranger in the earth” (verse 19), but they are not wanderers: they are passing through an enemy’s country, but their route is direct; they are seeking their Lord while they traverse this foreign land. Their way is hidden from men; but yet they have not lost their way.

The man of God exerts himself, but does not trust himself: his heart is in his walking with God; but he knows that even his whole strength is not enough to keep him right unless his King shall be his keeper, and he who made the commands shall make him constant in obeying them: hence the prayer, **“O let me not wander,”** Still, this sense of need was never turned into an argument for idleness; for while he prayed to be kept in the right road he took care to run in it, with his whole heart seeking the Lord.

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

11. “Thy word have I hid in mine heart, that I might not sin against thee.”

When a godly man sues for a favour from God he should carefully use every means for obtaining it, and accordingly, as the

Psalmist had asked to be preserved from wandering, he here shows us the holy precaution which he had taken to prevent his falling into sin.

“Thy word have I hid in mine heart.” His heart would be kept by the word because he kept the word in his heart. All that he had of the word written, and all that had been revealed to him by the voice of God, — all, without exception, he had stored away in his affections, as a treasure to be preserved in a casket, or as a choice seed to be buried in a fruitful soil: what soil more fruitful than a renewed heart, wholly seeking the Lord? The word was God’s own, and therefore precious to God’s servant. He did not wear a text *on* his heart as a charm, but he hid it in his heart as a rule. He laid it up in the place of love and life, and it filled the chamber with sweetness and light. We must in this imitate David, copying his heart-work as well as his outward character. First, we must mind that what we believe is truly God’s word; that being done, we must hide or treasure it each man for himself; and we must see that this is done, not as a mere feat of the memory, but as the joyful act of the affections.

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

A very pleasant variety of meaning is obtained by laying stress upon the words **“thy”** and **“thee.”** He speaks to *God*, he loves the word because it is *God’s* word, and he hates sin because it is sin against *God* himself. If he vexed others, he minded not so long as he did not offend his God. If we would not cause God displeasure

we must treasure up his own word.

The personal way in which the man of God did this is also noteworthy: ***“With my whole heart have I sought thee.”*** Whatever others might choose to do, he had already made his choice, and placed the Word in his innermost soul as his dearest delight; and however others might transgress, his aim was after holiness: ***“That I might not sin against thee.”*** This was not what he proposed to do, but what he had already done: many are great at promising, but the Psalmist had been true in performing: hence he hoped to see a sure result. When the word is hidden in the heart the life shall be hidden from sin.

The parallelism between the second octave and the first is still continued. Verse 3 speaks of doing no iniquity, while this verse treats of the method of not sinning. When we form an idea of a blessedly holy man (verse 3), it becomes us to make an earnest effort to attain unto the same sacred innocence and divine happiness; and this can only be through heart-piety founded on the Scriptures.

12. *“Blessed art thou, O LORD: teach me thy statutes.”*

“Blessed art thou, O LORD.” These are words of adoration arising out of an intense admiration of the divine character, which the writer is humbly aiming to imitate. He blesses God for all that he has revealed to him, and wrought in him; he praises him with warmth of reverent love, and depth of holy wonder. These are also words of perception uttered from a remembrance of the great Jehovah’s infinite happiness within himself. The Lord is and must be blessed, for he is the perfection of holiness; and this is probably the reason why this is used as a plea in this place. It is as if David had said: I see that in conformity to thyself my way to happiness must lie, for thou art supremely blessed; and if I am made in my measure like to thee in holiness, I shall also partake in thy blessedness.

No sooner is the word in the heart than a desire arises to mark and learn it. When food is eaten, the next thing is to digest it; and when the word is received into the soul, the first prayer is — Lord,

teach me its meaning. *“Teach me thy statutes;”* for thus only can I learn the way to be blessed. Thou art so blessed that I am sure thou wilt delight in blessing others; and this boon I crave of thee that I may be instructed in thy commands. Happy men usually rejoice to make others happy; and surely the happy God will willingly impart the holiness which is the fountain of happiness. Faith prompted this prayer and based it, not upon anything in the praying man, but solely upon the perfection of the God to whom he made supplication. Lord, thou art blessed; therefore bless me by teaching me.

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

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

13. “*With my lips have I declared all the judgments of thy mouth.*”

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

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

What a joy to any man to be able to look back upon *a faithful* testimony to divine truth and when weary after Sabbath services, how sweet to feel that we have spoken, not our own words, but the teachings of divine revelation! When we shall come to die, it will be no mean consolation that we have “kept the faith.” Christ

will surely plead for those whose lives are spent in pleading for him.

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

Delight in the word of God is a sure proof that it has taken effect upon the heart, and so is cleansing the life. The Psalmist not only says that he does rejoice, but that he has rejoiced. For years it had been his joy and bliss to give his soul to the teaching of the word. His rejoicing had not only arisen out of the word of God, but out of the practical characteristics of it. The way was as dear to him as the Truth and the Life. There was no picking and choosing with David, or if indeed he did make a selection, he chose the most practical first.

“As much as in all riches.” He compared his intense satisfaction with God’s will with that of a man who possesses large and varied estates, and the heart to enjoy them. David knew the riches that come of sovereignty, and which grow out of conquest; he valued the wealth which proceeds from labour, or is gotten by inheritance: he knew “all riches.” The gracious king had been glad to see the gold and silver poured into his treasury that he might devote vast masses of it to the building of the Temple of Jehovah upon Mount Zion. He rejoiced in all sorts of riches consecrated and laid up for the noblest uses, and yet the way of God’s word had given him more pleasure than even these. Observe that his joy was personal, distinct, remembered, and abundant. Wonder not that in the previous verse he glories in having spoken much of that which he had so much enjoyed: a man may well talk of that which is his delight.

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

“I will meditate in thy precepts.” He who has an inward delight in anything will not long withdraw his mind from it. As the miser often returns to look upon his treasure, so does the devout believer, by frequent meditation, turn over the priceless wealth

which he has discovered in the Book of the Lord. To some men meditation is a task; to the man of cleansed way it is a joy. He who has meditated will meditate; he who saith, "I have rejoiced," is the same who adds, "***I will meditate.***" No spiritual exercise is more profitable to the soul than that of devout meditation; why are many of us so exceeding slack in it? It is worthy of observation that the preceptory part of God's word was David's special subject of meditation; and this was the more natural because the question was still upon his mind as to how a young man should cleanse his way. Practical godliness is vital godliness.

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

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

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

"***I will delight myself in thy statutes.***" In this verse delight follows meditation, of which it is the true flower and outgrowth. When we have no other solace, but are quite alone, it will be a glad thing for the heart to turn upon itself, and sweetly whisper, "I will delight myself. What if no minstrel sings in the hall; I will delight myself. If the time of the singing of birds has not yet arrived, and the voice of the turtle is not heard in our land, yet I will delight myself." This is the choicest and noblest of all rejoicing; in fact, it is the good part which can never be taken from us; but there is no delighting ourselves with anything below that

which God intended to be the soul's eternal satisfaction. The statute-book is intended to be the joy of every loyal subject. When the believer once peruses the sacred pages, his soul burns within him as he turns first to one and then to another of the royal words of the great King — words full and firm, immutable and divine.

“I will not forget thy word.” Men do not readily forget that which they have treasured up (verse 14), that which they have meditated on (verse 15), and that which they have often spoken of (verse 13). Yet since we have treacherous memories, it is well to bind them well with the knotted cord of ***“I will not forget.”***

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

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

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

The first of six booklets.

