

ALEPH - TAU

**THE
GOLDEN
ALPHABET**

**PART SIX
PSALM 119:145-176**



C. H. Spurgeon

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The Golden Alphabet — Part Six — Psalm 119:145-176

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Exposition of verses 145 to 152, Roph

145. *I cried with my whole heart; hear me, O Lord: I will keep thy statutes.*

146. *I cried unto thee; save me, and I shall keep thy testimonies.*

147. *I prevented the dawning of the morning, and cried: I hoped in thy word.*

148. *Mine eyes prevent the night watches, that I might meditate in thy word.*

149. *Hear my voice according unto thy lovingkindness: O LORD, quicken me according to thy judgment.*

150. *They draw nigh that follow after mischief: they are far from thy law.*

151. *Thou art near, O Lord; and all thy commandments are truth.*

152. *Concerning thy testimonies, I have known of old that thou hast founded them for ever.*

This section is given up to memories of prayer. The Psalmist describes the time and the manner of his supplication, and pleads with God for deliverance from his troubles. He who has been with God in the closet will find God with him in the furnace. If we have cried we shall be answered. Delayed answers may drive us to importunity; but we need not fear the ultimate result, since God's promises are not uncertain, but are "founded for ever." The whole passage shows us: How he prayed (verse 145). What he prayed for (146). When he prayed (147). How long he prayed (148). What he pleaded (149). What happened (151). How he was rescued (150). What was his witness as to the whole matter (152). May the Lord bless our meditations on this instructive passage!

145. *"I cried with my whole heart; hear me, O Lord: I will keep thy statutes."*

"I cried with my whole heart." His prayer was a sincere, plaintive, painful, natural utterance, as of a creature in pain. We cannot tell whether at all times he used his voice when he thus cried; but we are informed of something which is of much greater

consequence — he cried with his heart. Heart-cries are the essence of prayer. He mentions the unity of his heart in this holy engagement. His whole soul pleaded with God: his entire affections, his united desires, all went out towards the living God. It is well when a man can say as much as this of his prayers: it is to be feared that many never cried to God with their whole heart in all their lives. There may be no beauty of elocution about such prayers, no length of expression, neither depth of doctrine nor accuracy of diction; but if the whole heart be in them they will find their way to the heart of God.

“Hear me, O LORD.” He desires of Jehovah that his cries may not die upon the air, but that God may have respect to them. True supplicants are not satisfied with the exercise itself, they have an end and object in praying, and they look out for it. If God does not hear prayer we pray in vain. The term ***“hear”*** is often used in Scripture to express attention and consideration. In one sense God hears every sound that is made on earth, and every desire of every heart; but David meant much more: he desired a kindly, sympathetic hearing, such as a physician gives to his patient when he tells him his pitiful story. He asked that the Lord would draw near, and listen with friendly ear to the voice of his complaint, with the view of pitying him and helping him. Observe that his whole-hearted prayer goes to the Lord alone; he has no second hope or help. ***“Hear me, O Lord,”*** is the full range of his petition and expectation.

“I will keep thy statutes.” He could not expect the Lord to hear him if he did not hear the Lord, neither would it be true that he prayed with his whole heart unless it was manifest that he laboured with all his might to be obedient to the divine will. His object in seeking deliverance was that he might be free to fulfil his religion, free to carry out every ordinance of the law, free to serve the Lord.

Note well that a holy resolution goes well with an importunate supplication: David is determined to be holy; his whole heart goes with that resolve as well as with his prayers. He will keep God’s statutes in his memory, in his affections, and in his actions. He will not wilfully neglect nor willingly violate any one of the divine laws.

146. *“I cried unto thee; save me, and I shall keep thy testimonies.”*

“I cried unto thee.” Again he mentions that his prayer was unto God alone. The sentence imports that he prayed vehemently, and very often; and that it had become one of the greatest facts of his life that he cried unto God.

“Save me.” This was his prayer; very short, but very full. He needed saving; none but the Lord could save him; to the Lord he cried. ***“Save me,”*** from the dangers which surround me, from the enemies that pursue me, from the temptations which beset me, from the sins which accuse me. He did not multiply words, but only cried ***“Save me.”*** Men are never wordy when they are in downright earnest. He did not multiply objects, but asked only for salvation. Men are seldom discursive when they are intent upon the one thing needful.

“And I shall keep thy testimonies.” This was his great object in desiring salvation, that he might be able to continue in a blameless life of obedience to God, that he might be able to believe the witness of God, and also to become himself a witness for God. It is a great thing when men seek salvation for so high an end. He did not ask to be delivered that he might sin with impunity; his cry was to be delivered from sin itself. He had vowed to keep the statutes or laws of God; here he resolves to keep the testimonies or doctrines of God, and so to be sound of head as well as clean of hand. Salvation brings all these good things in its train. David had no idea of a salvation which would allow him to live in sin, or abide in error: he knew right well that there is no saving a man while he abides in disobedience and ignorance.

147. *“I prevented the dawning of the morning, and cried: I hoped in thy word.”*

“I prevented the dawning of the morning, and cried.” He was up before the sun, and began his pleadings before the dew began to leave the grass. Whatever is worth doing: is worth doing speedily. This is the third time that he mentions that he cried. He cried, and cried, and cried again. His supplications had become so frequent, fervent, and intense, that he might hardly be said to be doing anything else from morning to night but crying unto his God. So strong was his desire after salvation that he could not rest in his bed; so eagerly did he seek it that at the first possible moment he was on

his knees.

“I hoped in thy word.” Hope is a very powerful means of strengthening us in prayer. Who would pray if he had no hope that God would hear him? Who would not pray when he has a good hope of a blessed issue to his entreaties? His hope was fixed upon God’s word; and this is a sure anchorage, because God is true, and in no case has he ever run back from his promise, or altered the thing that has gone forth from his mouth. He who is diligent in prayer will never be destitute of hope. Observe that as the early bird gets the worm, so the early prayer is soon refreshed with hope.

148. *“Mine eyes prevent the night watches, that I might meditate in thy word.”*

“Mine eyes prevent the night watches.” Or rather, the watches. Before the watchman cried the hour, he was crying to God. He did not need to be informed as to how the hours were flying, for every hour his heart was flying towards heaven. He began the day with prayer, and he continued in prayer through the watches of the day, and the watches of the night. The soldiers changed guard, but David did not change his holy occupation. Specially, however, at night did he keep his eyes open, and drive away sleep, that he might maintain communion with his God. He worshipped on from watch to watch as traveller’s journey from stage to stage.

“That I might meditate in thy word.” This had become meat and drink: to him. Meditation was the food of his hope, and the solace of his sorrow: the one theme upon which his thoughts ran was that blessed ***“word”*** which he continually mentions, and in which his heart so greatly rejoices. He preferred study to slumber, and he learned to forego his necessary sleep for much more necessary devotion. It is instructive to find meditation so constantly connected with fervent prayer: it is the fuel which sustains the flame. How rare an article is it in these days!

When do we meet with any who spend nights in meditation? Have we done so ourselves?

149. *“Hear my voice according unto thy lovingkindness: O Lord, quicken me according to thy judgment.”*

“Hear my voice according unto thy lovingkindness:” Men find it

very helpful to use their voices in prayer; it is difficult long to maintain the intensity of devotion unless we hear ourselves speak; hence David at length broke through his silence, arose from his quiet meditations, and began crying with voice as well as heart unto the Lord his God. Note, that he does not plead his own deservings, nor for a moment appeal for payment of a debt on account of merit; he takes the free-grace way, and puts it, ***“according unto thy lovingkindness.”*** When God hears prayer according to his lovingkindness he overlooks all the imperfections of the prayer, he forgets the sinfulness of the offerer, and in pitying love he grants the desire though the suppliant be unworthy. It is according to God’s lovingkindness to answer speedily, to answer frequently, to answer abundantly, yea, exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or even think. Loving-kindness is one of the sweetest words in our language. Kindness has much in it that is most precious, but lovingkindness is doubly dear; it is the cream of kindness.”

“O Lord, quicken me according to thy judgment?” This is another of David’s wise and ardent prayers. He first cried, “Save me;” then, “Hear me;” and now, ***“Quicken me.”*** This is often the very best way of delivering us from trouble — to give us more life that we may escape from death; and to add more strength to that life, that we may not be overloaded with its burdens. Observe, that he asks to receive quickening according to God’s judgment, that is, in such a way as should be consistent with infinite wisdom and prudence. God’s methods of communicating greater vigour to our spiritual life are exceedingly wise; it would probably be in vain for us to attempt to understand them; and it will be our wisdom to wish to receive grace; not according to our notion of how it should come to us, but according to God’s heavenly method of bestowing it. It is his prerogative to make alive as well as to kill, and that sovereign act is best left to his infallible judgment. Hath he not already given us to have life, and to have it more abundantly? In this gift “he hath abounded toward us in all wisdom and prudence.”

150. “They draw nigh that follow after mischief: they are far from thy law.”

“They draw nigh that follow after mischief.” He could hear their footfalls close behind him. They are not following him for his

benefit: but for his hurt, and therefore the sound of their approach is to be dreaded. They are not prosecuting a good object, but persecuting a good man. As if they had not enough mischief in their own hearts, they are hunting after more. He sees them going a steeple-chase over hedge and ditch in order to bring mischief to himself, and he points them out to God, and entreats the Lord to fix his eyes upon them, and deal with them to their confusion. They were already upon him, and he was almost in their grip, and therefore he cries the more earnestly.

“They are far from thy law.” A mischievous life cannot be an obedient one. Before these men could become persecutors of David they were obliged to get away from the restraints of God’s law. They could not hate a saint and yet love the law. Those who keep God’s law neither do harm to themselves nor to others. Sin is the greatest of all mischiefmakers. David mentions the character of his adversaries to the Lord in prayer, feeling some kind of comfort in the fact that those who hated him hated God also, and broke the law when they sought to work him ill. When we know that our enemies are God’s enemies, and ours because they are his, we may well take comfort to ourselves.

151. “Thou art near, O Lord; and all thy commandments are truth.”

“Thou art near, O Lord.” Near as the enemy might be, God was nearer: this is one of the choicest comforts of the persecuted child of God. The Lord is near to hear our cries, and to speedily afford us succour. He is near to chase away our enemies, and to give us rest and peace.

“And all thy commandments are truth.” God neither commands; a lie, nor lies in his commands. Virtue is truth in action, and this is what God commands. Sin is falsehood in action, and this is what God forbids. If all God’s commands are truth, then the true man will be glad to keep near to them, and therein he will find the true God near to him. This sentence will be the persecuted man’s protection from the false hearts that seek to do him mischief: God is near and God is truer therefore his people are safe. If at any time we fall into danger through keeping the commands of God, we need not suppose that we have acted unwisely: we may, on the contrary, be quite sure

that we are in the right way; for God's precepts are right and true, and for this very reason wicked men assail us. False hearts hate the truth, and therefore hate those who do the truth. Their opposition may be our consolation; while God's presence upon our side is our glory and delight.

152. *“Concerning thy testimonies, I have known of old that thou hast founded them for ever.”*

David found of old that God had founded his testimonies of old, and that they would stand firm throughout all ages. It is a very blessed thing to be so early taught of God that we know the substantial doctrines of the gospel even from our youth. Those who know the eternal truth in their early days will look back upon such knowledge with pleasure in their riper years.

Those who think that David was a young man when he wrote this psalm will find it rather difficult to reconcile this verse with their theory; it is much more probable that he was now grown grey, and was looking back upon what he had known long before. He knew at the very first that the doctrines of God's word were settled before the world began, that they had never changed, and never could by any possibility, be altered. He had begun by building on a rock, by knowing that God's testimonies were ***“founded,”*** that is, grounded, laid as foundations, settled and established; and that they were thus settled with a view to all the ages that should come, and all the changes that should happen. It was because David knew this that he had such confidence in prayer, and was so importunate in it. It is sweet to plead immutable promises with an immutable God. It was because of this that David learned to hope: a man cannot have much expectation from a changing friend, but he may well have confidence in a God who cannot change. It was because of this that he delighted in being near the Lord, for it is a most blessed thing to keep up close intercourse with a Friend who never varies. Let those who choose follow at the heels of the modern school and look for fresh light to break forth which will put the old light out of countenance; we are satisfied with the truth which is as old as the hills, and as fixed as the great mountains. Let “cultured intellect” invent another god, more gentle and effeminate than the God of Abraham; we are well content to worship Jehovah, who is eternally

the same. Things everlastingly established are the joy of established saints. Bubbles please boys, but men prize those things which are solid and substantial, with a foundation and a bottom to them which will bear the test of the ages.

Exposition of verses 153 to 160, Resh

153. Consider mine affliction, and deliver me: for I do not forget thy law.

154. Plead my cause, and deliver me: quicken me according to thy word.

155. Salvation is far from the wicked: for they seek not thy statutes.

156. Great are thy tender mercies, O Lord: quicken me according to thy judgments.

157. Many are my persecutors and mine enemies; yet do I not decline from thy testimonies.

158. I beheld the transgressors, and was grieved; because they kept not thy word.

159. Consider how I love thy precepts: quicken me, O Lord, according to thy lovingkindness.

160. Thy word is true from the beginning: and every one of thy righteous judgments endureth for ever.

In this section the Psalmist seems to draw still nearer to God in prayer, and to state his case and to invoke the divine help with more of boldness and expectation. It is a pleading passage, and the keyword of it is, "**Consider.**" With much boldness he pleads his intimate union with the Lord's cause as a reason why he should be aided. The special aid that he seeks is personal quickening, for which he cries to the Lord again and again.

153. "Consider mine affliction, and deliver me: for I do not forget thy law."

"**Consider mine affliction, and deliver me.**" The writer has a good case, though it be a grievous one, and he is ready, yea, anxious, to submit it to the divine arbitration. His matters are right, and he is ready to lay them before the supreme court. His manner is that of one who feels safe at the throne. Yet there is no impatience; he does not ask for hasty action, but for consideration. In effect he

cries — “Look into my grief, and see whether I do not need to be delivered. From my sorrowful condition judge as to the proper method and time for my rescue: The Psalmist desires two things, and these two things blended: first, a full consideration of his sorrow; secondly, deliverance; and, then, that this deliverance should come with a consideration of his affliction. It should be the desire of every gracious man who is in adversity that the Lord should look upon his need, and relieve it in such a way as shall be most for the divine glory, and for his own benefit. The words, *“mine affliction,”* are picturesque; they seem to portion off a special spot of woe as the writer’s own inheritance: he possesses it as no one else had ever done, and he begs the Lord to have that special spot under his eye: even as a husbandman looking over all his fields may yet take double care of a certain selected plot. His prayer is eminently practical, for he seeks to be delivered; that is, brought out of his trouble and preserved from sustaining any serious damage by it For God to *“consider”* is to act in due season: men consider and do nothing; but such is never the case with our God.

“For I do not forget thy law.” His affliction was not sufficient, with all its bitterness, to drive out of his mind the memory of God’s law; nor could it lead him to act contrary to the divine command. He forgot prosperity, but he did not forget obedience. This is a good plea when it can be honestly urged. If we are kept faithful to God’s precept, we may be sure that God will remain faithful to his promise. If we do not forget his law, the Lord will not forget us. He will not long leave that man in trouble whose only fear in trouble is lest he should leave the way of right.

154 *“Plead my cause, and deliver me: quicken me according to thy word.”*

“Plead my cause, and deliver me?” In the last verse he had prayed, *“Deliver me,”* and here he specifies one method in which that deliverance might be vouchsafed, namely, by the advocacy of his cause. In providence the Lord has many ways of clearing the slandered of the accusations brought against them. He can make it manifest to all that they have been belied, and in this way he can practically plead their cause. He can, moreover, raise up friends for the godly who will leave no stone unturned till their characters are

cleared; or he can smite their enemies with such fearfulness of heart that they will be forced to confess their falsehood, and thus the righteous will be delivered without the striking of a blow. Dr. Alexander reads it; “Strive my strife, and redeem me” — that is, stand in my stead, bear my burden, fight my fight, pay my price, and bring me out to liberty. When we feel ourselves dumb before the foe, here is a prayer made to our hand. What a comfort that if we sin we have an advocate, and if we do not sin the same pleader is engaged on our side!

“Quicken me.” We had this prayer in the last section, and we shall have it again and again in this, It is a desire which cannot be too often felt and expressed. As the soul is the centre of everything, so to be quickened is the central blessing. More life means more love, more grace, more faith, more courage, more strength; and if we get these we can hold up our heads before our adversaries. God alone can give this quickening; but to the Lord and Giver of life the wink is easy enough, and he delights to perform it.

“According to thy word.” David had found the blessing of quickening among the promised things, or at least he perceived that it was according to the general tenor of God’s word that tried believers should be quickened and brought up again from the dust of the earth; therefore he pleads the word, and desires the Lord to act to him according to the usual run of that word. It is an implied if not an expressed promise, that the Lord will quicken his people. What a mighty plea is this — **“according to thy word!”** No gun in all our arsenals can match it.

155. “Salvation is far from the wicked: for they seek not thy statutes.”

“Salvation is far from the wicked.” By their perseverance in evil they have almost put themselves out of the pale of hope. They talk about being saved but they cannot know anything of it or they would not remain wicked. Every step they have taken in the path of evil has removed them further from the kingdom of grace: they go from one degree of hardness to another till their hearts become as stone. When they fall into trouble it will be irremediable. Yet they talk big, as if they either needed no salvation, or could save themselves whenever their fancy turned that way. They are so far

off from salvation that they do not even know what it means.

“For they seek not thy statutes.” They do not endeavour to be obedient, but quite the reverse; they seek themselves, they seek evil, and therefore they never find the way of peace and righteousness. When men have broken the statutes of the Lord, their wisest course is by repentance to seek forgiveness, and by faith to seek: salvation: then salvation is near them, so near them that they shall not miss it; but when the wicked continue to seek after mischief, salvation is set further and further from them. Salvation and God’s statutes go together: those who are saved by the King of grace love the statutes of the King of glory. The main reason why men are not saved is that they get away from the Word of God.

156. *“Great are thy tender mercies, O Lord: quicken me according to thy judgments.”*

This verse is exceedingly like verse one hundred and forty-nine, and yet it is no vain repetition. There is such a difference in the main idea that the one verse stands out distinct from the other. In the first case he mentions his prayer, but leaves the method of its accomplishment with the wisdom or judgment of God; while here he pleads no prayer of his own, but simply the mercies of the Lord, and begs to be quickened by judgments rather than to be left to spiritual lethargy. We may take it for granted that an inspired author is never so short of thoughts as to be obliged to repeat himself: where we think we have a repetition of the same idea in this psalm we are misled by our neglect of careful study. Each verse is a distinct pearl. Each blade of grass in this field has its own drop of heavenly dew.

“Great are thy tender mercies, O Lord.” Here the Psalmist pleads the largeness of God’s mercy, the immensity of his tender love; yea, he speaks of mercies — mercies many, mercies tender, mercies great; and with the glorious Jehovah he makes this a plea for his one leading prayer, the prayer for quickening. Quickening is a great and tender mercy; and it is many mercies in one. Shall One so greatly good permit his servant to die? Will not One so tender breathe new life into him?

“Quicken me according to thy judgments.” A measure of awakening comes with the judgments of God; they are startling and

arousing; and hence the believer's quickening thereby. David would have every severe stroke sanctified to his benefit, as well as every tender mercy. The first clause of this verse may run, "Many" or "manifold are thy compassions, O Jehovah." This he remembers in connection with the "many persecutors" of whom he will speak in the next verse. By all these many mercies he pleads for enlivening grace, and thus he has many strings to his bow. We shall never be short of arguments if we draw them from God himself, and urge both his mercies and his judgments as reasons for our quickening.

157. *"Many are my persecutors and mine enemies; yet do I not decline from thy testimonies."*

"Many are my persecutors and mine enemies." Those who actually assail me, or who secretly abhor me, are many. He sets this over against the many tender mercies of God. It seems a strange thing that such a truly godly man, as David was, should have many enemies; but it was inevitable. The disciple cannot be loved where his Master is hated. The seed of the serpent must oppose the seed of the woman: it is their nature.

"Yet do I not decline from thy testimonies." He did not deviate from the truth of God, but proceeded in the straight way, however many adversaries might endeavour to block up his path. Some men have been led astray by one enemy, but here is a saint who held on his way in the teeth of many persecutors. There is enough in the testimonies of God to recompense us for pushing forward against all the hosts that may combine against us. So long as they cannot drive or draw us into a spiritual decline, our foes have done us no great harm; indeed, they have accomplished nothing by their malice. If we do not decline they are defeated. If they cannot make us sin they have missed their mark. Faithfulness to the truth is victory over our enemies.

158. *"I beheld the transgressors, and was grieved; because they kept not thy word."*

"I beheld the transgressors." I saw the traitors; I understood their character, their object, their way, and their end. I could not help seeing them, for they pushed themselves into my way. As I was obliged to see them, I fixed my eyes on them, to learn what I could

from them.

“And was grieved.” I was sorry to see such sinners. I was sick of them, disgusted with them, I could not endure them. I found no pleasure in them, they were a sad sight to me, however fine their clothing or witty their chattering. Even when they were most mirthful a sight of them made my heart heavy; I could not tolerate either them or their doings.

“Because they kept not thy word.” My grief was occasioned more by their sin against God than by their enmity against myself. O Lord, I could bear their evil treatment of my words, but not their neglect of thy word. Thy word is so precious to me that those who will not keep it move me to indignation; I cannot keep the company of those who keep not God’s word. That they should have no love for me is a trifle; but to despise the teaching of the Lord is abominable.

159. “Consider how I love thy precepts: quicken me, O Lord, according to thy lovingkindness.”

“Consider,” or see, **“how I love thy precepts.”** A second time he asks for consideration. As he said before, **“Consider mine affliction,”** so now he says **“Consider mine affection.”** He loved the precepts of God — loved them unspeakably — loved them so as to be grieved with those who did not love them. This is a sure test: many there are who have a warm side towards the promises, but as for the precepts, they cannot endure them. The Psalmist so loved everything that was good and excellent, that he loved all that God had commanded. The precepts are all of them wise and holy, therefore the man of God loved them extremely, loved to know them, to think of them, to proclaim them, and principally to practice them. He asked the Lord to remember and consider this, not upon the ground of merit, but that it should serve as an answer to the slanderous accusations which at this time were the sting of his sorrow.

“Quicken me, O Lord, according to thy loving-kindness.” Here he comes back to his former prayer, **“quicken me”** (v. 154), **“quicken me”** (v. 156). **“quicken me.”** He prays again the third time, using the same words. There is no harm in using repetitions: the thing forbidden is the using of vain repetitions, as the heathen

do. David felt like one who was half stunned with the assaults of his foes, ready to faint under their incessant malice; hence he cries, ***“Quicken me.”*** What he wanted was revival, restoration, renewal; therefore he pleaded for more life. O thou, who didst quicken me when I was dead, quicken me again, that I may not return to the dead! Quicken me that I may outlive the blows of my enemies, the faintness of my faith, and the swooning of my sorrow. This time he does not say, “Quicken me according to thy judgments,” but, ***“Quicken me, O Lord, according to thy lovingkindness.”*** On the love and mercy of God he places his last and greatest reliance. This is the great gun which he brings up last to the conflict: it is his ultimate argument; if this succeed not, he must fail. He has long been knocking at mercy’s gate, and with this plea he strikes his heaviest blow. When he had fallen into great sin this was his plea, “Have mercy upon me, O God, according to thy lovingkindness,” and now that he is in great trouble he flies to the same effectual reasoning. Because God is love he will give us life; because he is kind he will again kindle the heavenly flame within us.

160. *“Thy word is true from the beginning: and every one of thy righteous judgments endureth for ever.”*

The sweet singer finishes up this section in the same way as the last, by dwelling upon the sureness of the truth of God. It will be well for the reader to note the likeness between verses 144, 152, and the present one.

“Thy word is true.” Whatever the transgressors may say, God is true, and his word is true. The ungodly are false, but God’s word is true. They charge us with being false, but our solace is that God’s true word will clear us.

“From the beginning.” God’s word has been true from the first moment in which it was spoken, true throughout the whole of history, true to us from the instant in which we believed it; ay, true to us before we were true to it. Some read it, “Thy word is true from the head;” true, as a whole, true from top to bottom. Experience had taught David this lesson, and experience is teaching us the same. The Scriptures are as true in Genesis as in Revelation, and the five books of Moses are as inspired as the four Gospels.

“And every one of thy righteous judgments endureth for ever.”

That which thou hast decided remains irreversible in every case. Against the decisions of the Lord no writ of error can be demanded, neither will there ever be a repealing of any of the acts of his sovereignty. There is not one single mistake either in the word of God or in the providential dealings of God. Neither in the book of revelation nor of providence will there be any need to put a single line of errata. The Lord has nothing to regret or to retract, nothing to amend or to reverse. All God's judgments, decrees, commands, and purposes are righteous, and as righteous things are lasting things, every one of them will outlive the stars. "Till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law, till all be fulfilled." God's justice endureth for ever. This is a cheering thought; but there is a much sweeter one, which of old was the song of the priests in the temple; let it be ours: "His mercy endureth for ever,"

Exposition of verses 161 to 168, Schin

161. *Princes have persecuted me without a cause: but my heart standeth in awe of thy word.*

162. *I rejoice at thy word, as one that findeth great spoil.*

163. *I hate and abhor lying: but thy law do I love.*

164. *Seven times a day do I praise thee because of thy righteous judgments.*

165. *That peace have they which love thy law: and nothing shall offend them.*

166. *Lord, I have hoped for thy salvation, and done thy commandments.*

167. *My soul hath kept thy testimonies; and I love them exceedingly.*

168. *I have kept thy precepts and thy testimonies: for all my ways are before thee.*

We are drawing near to the end. The pulse of the Psalm beats more quickly than usual; the sentences are shorter, the sense is more vivid, the strain is more full and deep. The veteran of a thousand battles, the receiver of ten thousand mercies, rehearses his experience, and anew declares his loyalty to the Lord and his law. Oh, that when we come to the close of life we may be able to speak as David does as he closes his life-psalm! Not boastfully, but still

boldly, he places himself among the obedient servants of the Lord. Oh, to be clear in conscience when life's sun is setting!

161. *“Princes have persecuted me without a cause: but my heart standeth in awe of thy word.”*

“Princes have persecuted me without a cause.” Such persons ought to have known better; they should have had sympathy with one of their own rank. A man expects a fair trial at the hands of his peers. It is ignoble for any one to be prejudiced; but worst of all for noblemen to be so. If honour were banished from all other breasts it should remain in the bosom of kings, and certainly honour forbids the persecution of the innocent. Princes are appointed to protect the virtuous and avenge the oppressed, and it is a shame when they themselves become the assailants of the righteous. It was a sad case when the man of God found himself attacked by the judges of the earth, for their eminent position added weight and venom to their enmity. It was well that the sufferer could truthfully assert that this persecution was *“without a cause.”* He had not broken their laws, he had not injured them, he had not even desired to see them injured: he had not been an advocate of rebellion or anarchy, he had neither openly nor secretly opposed their power, and therefore, while this made their oppression the more inexcusable, it took away a part of its sting, and helped the brave-hearted servant of God to bear up under their oppressions.

“But my heart standeth in awe of thy word.” He might have been overcome by awe of the princes, had it not been that a greater fear drove out the less, and he was swayed by awe of God's word. How little are crowns and sceptres in the judgment of that man who perceives a more majestic royalty in the commands of his God! We are not likely to be disheartened by persecution, nor driven by it into sin, if the word of God exerts supreme power over our minds.

162. *“I rejoice at thy word, as one that findeth great spoil.”*

His awe did not prevent his joy; his fear of God was not of the kind which perfect love casts out, but of the sort which it nourishes. He trembled at the word of the Lord, and yet rejoiced at it. He compares his joy to that of one who has been long in battle, and has; at last won the victory and is dividing the spoil. This usually falls to

the lot of princes; and though David was divided from other monarchs by their persecution of him, yet he had victories of his own, which they understood not, and treasures in which they could not share. He could say, —

***“With causeless hate by princes chased,
Still on thy word my heart is placed.
That word I dread; that word I hold
More dear than heaps of captured gold.”***

“David’s spoil” was more than equal to the greatest gains of all the mighty men. His holy booty taken by his earnest contention for the truth of God was greater than all the trophies that can be gained in war. Grace divides greater spoil than falls to the lot of sword or bow. In the evil times we have to fight hard for divine truth: every doctrine costs us a battle. But when we gain a full understanding of eternal truth by personal struggles it becomes doubly precious to us. If we have unusual battling for the word of God, may we have for our spoil a firmer hold upon the priceless word!

Perhaps the passage may mean that the Psalmist rejoiced as one who comes upon hidden treasure for which he has not fought, in which case we find the analogy in the man of God who, while reading the Bible, makes grand and blessed discoveries of the grace of God laid up for him — discoveries which surprise him, for he looked not to find such a prize. Whether we come by the truth as finders or as warriors fighting for it, the heavenly treasure should be equally dear to us. With what quiet joy does the ploughman steal home with his golden find! How victors shout as they share the plunder! How glad should that man be who has discovered his portion in the promises of Holy Writ, and is able to enjoy that portion for himself, knowing by the witness of the Holy Spirit that it is all his own!

163. *“I hate and abhor lying: but thy law do I love.”*

“I hate and abhor lying.” A double expression for an inexpressible loathing. Falsehood in doctrine, in life, or in speech, falsehood in any form or shape, had become utterly detestable to the Psalmist. This was a remarkable statement for an Oriental to make; for, generally, lying is the delight of Easterns, and the only wrong

they see in it is when their skill is at fault, so that the lie is found out. David himself had made much progress when he had come to this; for he, too, had practiced guile in his day. He does not, however, alone refer to falsehood in conversation; he evidently intends perversity in faith and teaching. He wrote down all opposition to the God of truth as lying, and then he turned his whole soul against it with the intensest form of indignation. Godly men should detest false doctrine even as they abhor any other lie.

“But thy law do I love.” He did not merely yield to it, but he had great pleasure in it. A sullen obedience is essentially rebellion: only a hearty love will secure sincere loyalty to law. David loved the law of God because it is the foe of falsehood and the guardian of truth. His love was as ardent as his hate: he intensely loved the word of God, which is in itself pure truth. True men love truth, and hate lying. It is well for us to know which way our hates and loves run; and we may do essential service to others by declaring what are the objects of our admiration and detestation. Both love and hate are contagious, and when they are sanctified the wider their influence the better.

164. *“Seven times a day do I praise thee because of thy righteous judgments.”*

He laboured perfectly to praise his perfect God, and therefore fulfilled the perfect number of songs — that number being seven. He reached a Sabbath in his praise, and before he rested on his bed he found sweet rest in the joyful adoration of Jehovah. Seven may also intend notable frequency. Frequently he lifted up his heart in thanksgiving to God for his divine teachings in the word, and for his divine actions in providence. With his voice he extolled the righteousness of the Judge of all the earth. As often as he thought of God’s ways a song leaped to his lips. At the sight of the oppressive princes, and at the hearing of the abounding falsehood around him, he felt all the more bound to adore and magnify God, who in all things is truth and righteousness. When others slander us, or in any other way rob us of our just need of praise, it should be a warning to us not to fall into the same conduct towards our God, who is so much more worthy of honour. If we praise God when we are persecuted, our music will be all the sweeter to him because of our

constancy in suffering. If we keep clear of all lying, our song will be the more acceptable because it comes out of honest lips. If we never flatter men, we shall be in the better condition for honouring the Lord. Do we praise God seven times a day? Alas! The question needs altering — do we praise him once in seven days? O shameful fraud, which deprives the Ever Blessed of the music of this lower sphere!

The pre-eminent holiness of Jehovah's laws and acts should bring forth from us continued praise. Happy are holy men to be ruled by a righteous governor who never errs. Each lover of righteousness will say in his heart —

*“Just are thy laws; I daily raise
The sevenfold tribute of my praise”*

165. “Great peace have they which love thy law: and nothing shall offend them.”

“Great peace have they which love thy law.” What a charming verse is this! It deals not with those who perfectly keep the law — for where should such men be found? — but with those who love it, whose hearts and hands are made to square with its precepts and demands. These men are ever striving, with all their hearts, to walk in obedience to the law, and though they are often persecuted they have peace, yea, great peace; for they have learned the secret of the reconciling blood, they have felt the power of the comforting Spirit, and they stand before the Father as men accepted. The Lord has given them to feel his peace, which passeth all understanding. They have many troubles, and are likely to be persecuted by the proud; but their usual condition is that of deep calm peace too great for “these light afflictions” to break.

“And nothing shall offend them,” or, “shall really injure them.” “All things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose.” It must needs be that offences come; but these lovers of the law are peacemakers, and so they neither give nor take offence. That peace which is founded upon conformity to God's will is a living and lasting one, worth writing of with enthusiasm, as the Psalmist here does.

166. “Lord, I have hoped for thy salvation, and done thy

commandments.”

Here we have salvation by grace, and the fruits thereof. All David's hope was fixed upon God, he looked to him alone for salvation; and then he endeavoured most earnestly to fulfil the commands of his law. Those who place least reliance upon good works are very frequently those who have the most of them: that same divine teaching which delivers us from confidence in our own doings leads us to abound in every good work to the glory of God. In times of trouble there are two things to be done, the first is to hope in God, and the second is to do that which is right. The first without the second would be mere, presumption; the second without the first mere formalism. It is well if in looking back we can claim to have acted in the way which is commanded of the Lord. If we have acted rightly towards God we are sure that he will act kindly towards us.

167. “*My soul hath kept thy testimonies; and I love them exceedingly.*”

“My soul hath kept thy testimonies.” My outward life has kept thy precepts, and my inward life, my soul, has kept thy testimonies. God has borne testimony to many sacred truths, and these we hold fast with all our heart and soul, for we value them as life itself. The gracious man stores up the truth of God within his heart as a treasure exceedingly dear and precious — he keeps it His secret soul, his inmost self, becomes the guardian of these divine teachings which are his sole authority in soul matters. To him it becomes a great joy in his old age to be able to say, *“My soul hath kept thy testimonies.”*

“And I love them exceedingly.” This was why he kept them, and, having kept them, this was the result of the keeping. He did not merely store up revealed truth by way of duty, but because of a deep, unutterable affection for it. He felt that he could sooner die than give up any part of the revelation of God. The more we store our minds with heavenly truth, the more deeply shall we be in love with it: the more we see the exceeding riches of the Bible, the more will our love exceed measure, and exceed expression.

168. “*I have kept thy precepts and thy testimonies; for all my ways are before thee,*”

“I have kept thy precepts and thy testimonies.” Both the practical and the doctrinal parts of God’s word he had stored up, and preserved, and followed. It is a blessed thing to see the two forms of the divine word equally known, equally valued, equally confessed: there should be no picking and choosing as to the mind of God. We know those who endeavour to be careful as to the precepts, but who seem to think that the doctrines of the gospel are mere matters of opinion, which they may shape for themselves. This is not a perfect condition of things. We have known others again who are very rigid as to the doctrines, and painfully lax with reference to the precepts. This also is far from right. When the two are ***“kept”*** with equal earnestness, then have we the perfect man.

“For all my ways are before thee,” Probably he means to say that this was the motive of his endeavouring to be right both in head and heart, because he knew that God saw him, and under the sense of the divine presence he was afraid to err. Or else he is thus appealing to God to bear witness to the truth of what he has said. In either case it is no small consolation to feel that our heavenly Father knows all about us and that if princes speak against us, and worldlings fill their mouths with cruel lies, yet he can vindicate us, for there is nothing secret or hidden from him.

We are struck with the contrast between this verse, which is the last of its octave, and verse 176, which is similarly placed in the next octave. This is a protest of innocence, ***“I have kept thy precepts,”*** and that a confession of sin, ***“I have gone astray like a lost sheep.”*** Both were sincere, both accurate. Experience makes many a paradox plain, and this is one. Before God we may be clear of open fault, and yet at the same time mourn over a thousand heart-wanderings which need his restoring hand.

Exposition of verses 169 to 176, Tau

169. Let my cry come near before thee, O Lord: give me understanding according to thy word.

170. Let my supplication come before thee: deliver me according to thy word.

171. My lips shall utter praise, when thou hast taught me thy statutes.

172. My tongue shall speak of thy word: for all thy

commandments are righteousness.

173. Let thine hand help me; for I have chosen thy precepts.

174. I have longed for thy salvation, O Lord; and thy law is my delight.

175. Let my soul live, and it shall praise thee; and let thy judgments help me.

176. I have gone astray like a lost sheep; seek thy servant; for I do not forget thy commandments.

The Psalmist is now at the last section of the psalm, and his petitions gather still more force and fervency; he seems to break into the inner circle of divine fellowship, and to come even to the feet of the great God whose help he is imploring. This nearness creates the lowliest view of himself, and leads him to close the psalm, prostrate in the dust, in deepest self humiliation, begging to be sought out like a lost sheep.

169. "Let my cry come near before thee, O Lord: give me understanding according to thy word."

"Let my cry come near before thee, O Lord." He is tremblingly afraid lest he should not be heard. He is conscious that his prayer is nothing better than the "cry" of a poor child, or the groan of a wounded beast. He dreads lest it should be shut out from the ear of the Most High; but he very boldly prays that it may come before God, that it may be in his ear, under his notice, and looked upon with his acceptance. Yea, he goes further, and entreats, *"Let my cry come near before thee, O Lord:"* he wants the Lord's attention to his prayer to be very close and considerate.

He uses a figure of speech and personifies his prayer. We may picture his prayer as Esther, venturing into the royal presence, entreating an audience, and begging to find favour in the sight of the blessed and only Potentate. It is a very sweet thing to a suppliant when he knows of a surety that his prayer has obtained audience, when it has trodden the sea of glass before the throne, and has come even to the footstool of the glorious seat around which heaven and earth adore. It is to Jehovah that this prayer is expressed with trembling earnestness — our translators, filled with holy reverence, translate the word, *"O Lord."* We crave audience of none else, for we have confidence in none beside.

“Give me understanding according to thy word,” This is the prayer about which the Psalmist is so exceedingly anxious. With all his gettings he would get understanding, and whatever he misses he is resolved not to miss this priceless boon. He desires spiritual light and understanding, as it is promised in God’s word, as it proceeds from God’s word, and as it produces obedience to God’s word. He pleads as though he had no understanding whatever of his own, and asks to have one given to Him. ***“Give me understanding.”*** In truth, he had an understanding according to the judgment of men; but what he sought was an understanding according to God’s word, which is quite another thing. To understand spiritual things is the gift of God. To have a judgment enlightened by heavenly light and conformed to divine truth is a privilege which only grace can give. Many a man who is accounted wise after the manner of this world is a fool according to the word of the Lord. May we be among those happy children who shall all be taught of the Lord!

170. *“Let my supplication come before thee: deliver me according to thy word.”*

“Let my supplication come before thee.” It is the same entreaty, with a slight change of words. He humbly calls his cry a supplication, a sort of beggar’s petition; and again he asks for audience and for answer. There might be hindrances in the way to an audience, and he begs for their removal — ***“Let my supplication come.”*** Other believers are heard by the Great Lord himself — let my prayer come before thee: let me also have audience of my God.

“Deliver me according to thy word.” Rid me of mine adversaries, clear me of my slanderers, preserve me from my tempters, and bring me up out of all my afflictions, even as thy word has led me to expect thou wilt do. It is for this that in the previous verse he seek understanding. His enemies would succeed through his folly, if they succeeded at all; but if he exercised a sound discretion they would be baffled, and he would escape from them. The Lord in answer to prayer frequently delivers his children by making them wise as serpents as well as harmless as doves.

171 *“My lips shall utter praise, when thou hast taught me thy statutes.”*

He will not always be pleading for himself; he will rise above all

selfishness, and render thanks for the benefit received. He promises to praise God when he has obtained practical instruction in the life of godliness: this is something to praise for, no blessing is more precious. The best possible praise is that which proceeds from men who honour God, not only with their lips, but in their lives. We learn the music of heaven in the school of holy living. He whose life honours the Lord is sure to be a man of praise. David would not be silent in his gratitude, but he would express it in appropriate terms: his lips would utter what his life had practiced. Eminent disciples are wont to speak well of the master who instructed them; and this holy man, when taught the statutes of the Lord, promises to give all the glory to him to whom it is due.

172. “My tongue shall speak of thy word: for all thy commandments are righteousness.”

“My tongue shall speak of thy word.” When he had done singing he began preaching. God’s tender mercies are such that they may be either said or sung. When the tongue speaks of God’s word it has a most fruitful subject; such speaking will be as a tree of life, whose leaves shall be for the healing of the people. Men will gather together to listen to such talk, and they will treasure it up in their hearts. The worst of us is that for the most part we are full of our own words, and speak but little of God’s word. Oh, that we could come to the same resolve as this godly man, and say henceforth, **“My tongue shall speak of thy word.”** Then should we break through our sinful silence; we should no more be cowardly and half-hearted, but should be true witnesses for Jesus. It is not only of God’s works that we are to speak, but of his word. We may extol its truth, its wisdom, its preciousness, its grace, its power; and then we may tell of all it has revealed, all it has promised, all it has commanded, and all it has effected. The subject gives us plenty of sea-room; we may speak on for ever: the tale is for ever telling, yet untold.

“For all thy commandments are righteousness.” David appears to have been mainly enamoured of the preceptive part of the word of God, and concerning the precept his chief delight lay in its purity and excellence. When a man can speak thus from his heart, his heart is indeed a temple of the Holy Ghost.

He has said aforetime (verse 138), “Thy testimonies are righteous,” but here he declares that they are righteousness itself. The law of God is not only the standard of right, but it is the essence of righteousness. This the Psalmist affirms of each and every one of the precepts without exception. He felt like Paul — “The law is holy, and the commandment holy, and just, and good.” When a man has so high an opinion of God’s commandments, it is little wonder that his lips should be ready to extol the ever-glorious One.

173. “*Let thine hand help me; for I have chosen thy precepts.*”

“*Let thine hand help me.*” Give me practical succour. Do not entrust me to my friends or to thy friends, but put thine own hand to the work. Thy hand has both skill and power, readiness and force: display all these qualities on my behalf. I am willing to do the utmost that I am able to do; but what I need is thine help, and this is so urgently required that if I have it not I shall sink. Do not refuse thy succour. Great as thy hand is, let it light on me, even me. The prayer reminds us of Peter walking on the sea and beginning to sink; he, too, cried, “Lord, save me,” and the hand of his Master was stretched out for his rescue.

“*For I have chosen thy precepts.*” A good argument. A man may fitly ask help from God’s hand when he has dedicated his own hand entirely to the obedience of the faith. “*I have chosen thy precepts.*” His election was made, his mind was made up. In preference to all earthly rules and ways, in preference even to his own will, he had chosen to be obedient to the divine commands. Will not God help such a man in holy work and sacred service? Assuredly he will. If grace has given us the heart with which to will, it will also give us the hand with which to perform. Whenever, under the constraints of a divine call, we are engaged in any high and lofty enterprise, and feel it to be too much for our strength, we may always invoke the right hand of God in words like these.

174. “*I have longed for thy salvation, O Lord; and thy law is my delight.*”

“*I have longed for thy salvation, O Lord.*” He speaks like old Jacob on his deathbed; indeed, all saints, both in prayer and in

death, appear as one, in word, and deed, and mind. He knew God's salvation, and yet he longed for it; that is to say, he had experienced a measure of it, and he was therefore led to long for something yet higher and more complete. The holy hunger of the saints increases as it is satisfied. There is a salvation yet to come, when we shall be clean delivered from the body of this death, set free from all the turmoil and trouble of this mortal life, raised above the temptations and assaults of Satan, and brought near unto our God, to be like him and with him for ever and ever.

“I have longed for thy salvation, O Jehovah; and thy law is my delight.” The first clause tells us what the saint longs for, and this informs us what is his present satisfaction. God's law, contained in the Ten Commandments, gives joy to believers. God's law, that is, the entire Bible, is a well-spring of consolation and enjoyment to all who receive it. Though we have not yet reached the fullness of our salvation, yet we find in God's word so much concerning a present salvation that: we are even now delighted.

175. *“Let my soul live, and it shall praise thee; and let thy judgments help me.”*

“Let my soul live.” Fill it full of life, preserve it from wandering into the ways of death, give it to enjoy the indwelling of the Holy Ghost, let it live to the fullness of life, to the utmost possibilities of its new-created being.

“And it shall praise thee.” It shall praise thee for life, for new life, for eternal life, for thou art the Lord and Giver of life. The more it shall live, the more it shall praise, and when it shall live in perfection it shall praise thee in perfection. Spiritual life is prayer and praise.

“And let thy judgments help me.” While I read the record of what thou hast done, in terror or in love, let me be quickened and developed. While I see thy hand actually at work upon me, and upon others, chastening sin, and smiling upon righteousness, let me be helped both to live aright and to praise thee aright. Let all thy deeds in providence instruct me, and aid me in the struggle to overcome sin and to practice holiness. This is the second time he has asked for help in this portion; he was always in need of it, and so are we.

176. “I have gone astray like a lost sheep; seek thy servant; for I do not forget thy commandments.”

This is the finale, the conclusion of the whole matter: **“I have gone astray like a lost sheep”** — often, wilfully, wantonly, and even hopelessly but for thine interposing grace. In times gone by, before I was afflicted, and before thou hadst fully taught me thy statutes, I went astray. **“I went astray”** from the practical precepts, from the instructive doctrines, and from the heavenly experiences which thou hadst set before me. I lost my road, and I lost myself. Even now I am apt to wander, and, in fact, have roamed already; therefore, Lord, restore me.

**“Am not I thy wilder’d sheep?
Seek me, O thou Shepherd good,
Find, and for thy service keep
The dear purchase of thy blood;
Lost again if thou depart,
Hide me, Saviour, in thy heart.”**

“Seek thy servant.” He was not like a dog, that somehow or other can find its way back; but he was like a lost sheep, which goes further and further away from home; yet still he was a sheep, and the Lord’s sheep, his property, and precious in his sight, and therefore he hoped to be sought in order to be restored. However far he might have wandered he was still not only a sheep, but God’s **“servant,”** and therefore he desired to be, in his Master’s house again and once more honoured with commissions for his Lord. Had he been only a lost sheep he would not have prayed to be sought; but being also a **“servant,”** he had the power to pray. He cries, **“Seek thy servant,”** and he hopes not only to be sought, but forgiven, accepted, and taken into work again by his gracious Master.

Notice this confession; many times in the psalm David has defended his own innocence against foul-mouthed accusers; but when he comes into the presence of the Lord his God, he is ready enough to confess his transgressions. He here sums up, not only his past, but even his present life, under the image of a sheep which has broken from its pasture, forsaken the flock, left the shepherd, and brought itself into the wilderness, where it has become as a lost

thing. The sheep bleats, and David prays, "*Seek thy servant.*"

His argument is a forcible one, — "*for I do not forget thy commandments.*" I know the right; I approve and admire the right. What is more, I love the right, and long for it. I cannot be satisfied to continue in sin, I must be restored to the ways of righteousness. I have a homesickness after my God, I pine after the ways of peace; I do not and I cannot forget thy commandments, nor cease to know that I am always happiest and safest when I scrupulously obey thy law and find my joy in doing so. If the grace of God enables us to maintain in our hearts the loving memory of God's commandments, it will surely yet restore us to practical holiness. That man cannot be utterly lost whose heart is still with God. If he be gone astray in many respects, yet still, if he be true in his soul's inmost desires, he will be found again, and fully restored. Yet let the reader remember the first verse of the psalm while he reads the last: the major blessedness lies not in being restored from wandering, but in being upheld in a blameless way even to the end. Be it ours to keep the crown of the causeway, never leaving the King's highway for By-path Meadow, or any other flowery path of sin. May the Lord uphold us even to the end. Yet even then we shall not be able to boast with the Pharisee, but shall still pray with the publican, "God be merciful to me a sinner;" and with the Psalmist, "*Seek thy servant.*"

Let the last prayer of David in this Psalm be ours as we close these booklets and lift our hearts to the Chief Shepherd of the sheep. Amen.

The sixth of six booklets.

