

**ALEPH - TAU**

**THE  
GOLDEN  
ALPHABET**

**PART THREE  
PSALM 119:49-80**



**C. H. Spurgeon**

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## The Golden Alphabet — Part Three — Psalm 119:49-80

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### Exposition of verses 49 to 56, Zain

**49. Remember the word unto thy servant, upon, which thou hast caused me to hope.**

**50. This is my comfort in my affliction for thy word hath quickened me.**

**51. The proud have had me greatly in derision: yet have I not declined from thy law.**

**52. I remembered thy judgments of old, O LORD ; and have comforted myself.**

**53. Horror hath taken hold upon me because of the wicked that forsake thy law.**

**54. Thy statutes have been my songs in the house of my pilgrimage.**

**55. I have remembered thy name, O LORD, in the night, and have kept thy law.**

**56. This I had, because I kept thy precepts.**

This octrain deals with the comfort of the word. It begins by seeking the main consolation, namely, the Lord's fulfilment of his promise, and then it shows how the word sustains us under affliction, and makes us so impervious to ridicule that we are moved by the harsh conduct of the wicked rather to horror of their sin than to any submission to their temptations. We are then shown how the Scripture furnishes songs for pilgrims, and memories for night-watchers; and the portion concludes, by the general statement that the whole of this happiness and comfort arises out of keeping the statutes of the Lord.

**49. "Remember the word unto thy servant, upon which thou hast caused me to hope."**

**"Remember the word unto thy servant."** He asks for no new promise, but to have the old word fulfilled. He is grateful that he has received so good a word he embraces it with all his heart, and now entreats the Lord to deal with him according to it. He does not say, "Remember my service to thee," but "thy word to me." The words

of masters to servants are not always such that servants wish their lords to remember them; for they usually observe the faults and failings of the work done, so far as it does not tally with the word of command. But we who serve the best of masters are not anxious to have one of his words fall to the ground, since the Lord will so kindly remember his word of command as to give us grace wherewith we may obey, and he will couple with it a remembrance of his word of promise, so that our hearts shall be comforted. If God's word to us as his servants is so precious, what shall we say of his word to us as his sons?

The Psalmist does not fear a failure in the Lord's memory, but he makes use of the promise as a plea, and this is the form in which he speaks, after the manner of men when they plead with one another. When the Lord remembers the sins of his servant, and brings them, before his conscience, the penitent cries, Lord, remember thy word of pardon, and therefore remember my sins and iniquities no more. There is a world of meaning in that word "**remember,**" as it is addressed to God; it is used in Scripture in the tenderest sense, and suits the sorrowing and the depressed. The Psalmist cried, "Lord, remember David, and all his afflictions" Job also prayed that the Lord would appoint him a set time, and remember him. In the present instance the prayer is as personal as the "Remember me" of the thief, for its essence lies in the words — "**unto thy servant.**" It would be all in vain for us if the promise were remembered to all others if it did not come true to ourselves; but there is no fear of failure; for the Lord has never forgotten a single promise to a single believer.

**"Upon which thou hast caused me to hope."** The argument is that God, having given grace to hope in the promise, will never disappoint that hope. He cannot have caused us to hope without reason. If we hope upon his word we have a sure basis to build upon: our gracious Lord will never mock us by exciting false hopes. Hope, deferred maketh the heart sick; hence the petition for immediate remembrance of the cheering word. Moreover, it is the hope of a servant, and it is not possible that a great and good master would disappoint his dependent. If such a master's word were not kept, it could only be through an oversight; hence the anxious cry,

**“Remember.”** Our great Master will not forget his own servants, nor disappoint the expectation which he himself has raised: because we are the lord’s, and endeavour to remember his word by obeying it, we may be sure that he will think upon his own servants, and remember his own promise by making it good.

This verse is the prayer of love fearing to be forgotten, of humility conscious of insignificance and anxious not to be overlooked, of penitence trembling lest the evil of its sin should overshadow the promise, of eager desire longing for the blessing, and of holy confidence which feels that all that is wanted is comprehended in the word. Let but the Lord remember his promise, and the promised act is as good as done.

**50. “*This is my comfort in my affliction: for thy word hath quickened me.*”**

He means — Thy word is my comfort, or the fact that thy word has brought quickening to me is my comfort. Or he means that the hope which God had given him was his comfort, for God had quickened him thereby. Whatever may be the exact sense, it is clear that the Psalmist had affliction — affliction peculiar to himself, which he calls **“my affliction;”** that he had comfort in it — comfort specially his own, for he styles it **“my comfort;”** and that he knew what the comfort was, and where it came from, for he exclaims — **“This is my comfort.”** The worldling; clutches his money-bag, and says, **“This is my comfort;”** the spendthrift points to his gaiety, and shouts, **“This is my comfort;”** the drunkard lifts his glass, and sings, **“This is my comfort;”** but the man whose hope comes from God feels the life giving power of the word of the: Lord, and he testifies, **“This is my comfort.”** Paul said, “I know whom I have believed.” Comfort is desirable at all times; but comfort in affliction is like a lamp in a dark place. Some are unable to find comfort in tribulation; but it is not so with believers, for their Saviour has said to them, “I will not leave you comfortless.” Some have comfort and no affliction, others have affliction and no comfort; but the saints have comfort in their affliction.

The word frequently comfort us by increasing the force of our inner life: **“This is my comfort; thy word hath quickened me.”** To

quicken the heart is to cheer the whole man. Often the near way to consolation is by sanctification and invigoration. If we cannot clear away the fog, it may be better to rise to a higher level, and so to get above it. Troubles which weigh us down while we are half dead become mere trifles when we are full of life. Thus have we often been raised in spirit by quickening grace; and the same thing will happen again, for the Comforter is still with us, the Consolation of Israel ever liveth, and the very God of peace is evermore our Father. On looking back upon our past life there is one ground of comfort as to our state — the word of God has made us alive, and kept us so. We were dead, but we are dead no longer. From this we gladly infer that if the Lord had meant to destroy he would not have quickened us. If we were only hypocrites worthy of derision, as the proud ones say, he would not have revived us by his grace. An experience of quickening by the word of God is a fountain of good cheer.

See how the experience of this verse is turned into a prayer in verse 107: “Quicken me, O Lord, according unto thy word.” Experience teaches us how to pray, and furnishes arguments in prayer.

**51. *“The proud have had me greatly in derision: yet have I not declined from thy law.”***

***“The proud have had me greatly in derision.”*** Proud men never love gracious men, and as they fear them, they veil their fear under a pretended contempt. In this case their hatred revealed itself in ridicule, and that ridicule was loud and long. When they wanted sport they made sport of David because he was God’s servant. Men must have strange eyes to be able to see a farce in faith, and a comedy in holiness; yet it is sadly the case that men who are short of wit can generally provoke a broad grin by jesting at a saint. Conceited sinners make footballs of godly men. They call it roaring fun to, caricature a faithful member of “The Holy Club:” his methods of careful living are the material for their jokes about “the Methodist;” and his hatred of sin sets their tongues a-wagging at long faced Puritanism, and strait-laced hypocrisy. If David was greatly derided, we may not expect to escape the scorn of the

ungodly. There are hosts of proud men still upon the face of the earth, and if they find a believer in affliction they will be mean enough and cruel enough to make jests at his expense. It is the nature of the son of the bondwoman to mock the child of the promise.

***“Yet have I not declined from thy law.”*** Thus the deriders missed their aim: they laughed, but they did not win. The godly man, so far from turning aside from the right way, did not even slacken his pace, or in any sense fall off from his holy habits. Many would have declined, many have declined, but David did not do so. It is paying too much honour to fools to yield half a point to them. Their unhallowed mirth will not harm us if we pay no attention to it, even as the moon suffers nothing from the dogs that howl at her. God’s law is our highway of peace and safety, and those who would laugh us out of it wish us no good.

From verse 61 we note that David was not overcome by the spoiling of his goods any more than by these cruel mockings. See also verse 157, where the multitude of persecutors and enemies were baffled in their attempts to make him decline from God’s ways.

***52. “I remembered thy judgments of old, O Lord; and have comforted myself.”***

He had asked the Lord to remember, and here he remembers God and his judgments. When we see no present display of the divine power, it is wise to fall back upon the records of former ages, since they are just as available as if the transactions were of yesterday, seeing the Lord is always the same. Our true comfort must be found in what our God works on behalf of truth and right, and as the histories of the, olden times are full of divine interpositions, it is well to be thoroughly acquainted with them. Moreover, if we are advanced in years we have the providences of our early days to review, and these should by no means be forgotten or left out of our thoughts. The argument is good and solid: he who has shown himself strong on behalf of his believing people is the immutable God, and therefore we may expect deliverance at his hands. The grinning of the proud will not trouble us when we remember how

the Lord dealt with their predecessors in bygone periods: he destroyed them at the deluge, he confounded them at Babel, he drowned them at the Red Sea, he drove them out of Canaan: he has in all ages bared his arm against the haughty, and broken them as potters vessels. While in our own hearts we humbly drink of the mercy of God in quietude, we are not without comfort in seasons of turmoil and derision; for then we resort to God's justice, and remember how he scoffs at the scoffers' "He that sitteth in the heavens doth laugh, the Lord doth have them in derision."

When he was greatly derided the Psalmist did not sit down in despair, but rallied his spirits. He knew that comfort is needful for strength in service, and for the endurance of persecution, and therefore he comforted himself. In doing this he resorted not so much to the sweet as to the stern side of the Lord's dealings: he dwelt upon his judgments. If we can find sweetness in the divine justice, how much more shall we perceive it in divine love and grace! How thoroughly must that man be at peace with God who can find comfort, not only in his promises, but in his judgments! Even the terrible things of God are cheering to believers. They know that nothing is more to the advantage of all God's creatures than to be ruled by a strong hand which will deal out justice. The righteous man has no fear of the ruler's sword, which is only a terror to evil-doers. When the godly man is unjustly treated he finds comfort in the fact that there is a Judge of all the earth who will avenge his own elect, and redress the ills of these disordered times.

**53. *"Horror hath taken hold upon me because of the wicked that forsake thy law."***

He was horrified at their action, at the pride which led them to it, and at the punishment which would be sure to fall upon them for it. When he thought upon the ancient judgments of God he was filled with terror at the fate of the godless; as well he might be. Their laughter had not distressed him, but he was distressed by a fore sight of their overthrow. Truths which were amusement to them caused amazement to him. He saw them utterly turning away from the law of God, and leaving it as a path forsaken and overgrown from want of traffic, and this forsaking of the law filled him with

the most painful emotions: he was astonished at their wickedness, stunned by their presumption, alarmed by the expectation of their sudden overthrow, amazed by the terror of their certain doom.

See verses 106 and 158, and note the tenderness which combined with all this. Those who are the firmest believers in the eternal punishment of the wicked are the most grieved at their doom. It is no proof of tenderness to shut one's eyes to the awful doom of the ungodly. Compassion is far better shown in trying to save sinners than in attempting to make things pleasant all round. Oh that we were all more distressed as we think of the portion of the ungodly in hell! The usual plan is to shut your eyes to it, or try to doubt it; but the faithful servant of God can say, "So did not I, because of the fear of God."

**54. *"Thy statutes have been my songs in the house of my pilgrimage."***

Like others of God's servants, David knew that he was not at home in this world, but a pilgrim through it, seeking a better country. He did not, however, sigh over this fact, but he sang about it. He tells us nothing about his pilgrim sighs, but speaks of his pilgrim songs. Even the palace in which he dwelt was but "the house of his pilgrimage," the inn at which he rested, the station at which he halted for a little while. Men are wont to sing when they come to their inn, and so did this godly sojourner; he sang the songs of Zion, the statutes of the great King. The commands of God were as well known to him as the ballads of his country, and they were pleasant to his taste, and musical to his ear. Happy is the heart which finds its joy in the commands of God, and makes obedience its recreation. When religion is set to music it goes well. When we sing in the ways of the Lord it shows that our hearts are in them. Ours are pilgrim psalms, or Songs of Degrees; but they are such as we may sing throughout eternity; for the statutes of the Lord are the psalmody of the highest heaven. Saints find horror in sin, and harmony in holiness. The wicked shun the law, and the righteous sing of it. In past days we have sung the Lord's statutes, and in this fact we may find comfort in present affliction. Since our songs are so very different from those of the proud, we may expect



to join a very different choir at the last from that in which they sing, and to make music in a place far removed from their abode.

Note how in the sixth verses of their respective octaves we often find resolves to bless God, or records of testimony. In verse 46 it is, "I will speak," and in 62, "I will give thanks; while here he speaks of songs.

**55. *"I have remembered thy name, O LORD, in the night, and have kept thy law."***

***"I have remembered thy name, O LORD, in the night."*** When others slept I woke to think of thee, thy person, thy actions, thy covenant, thy name, under which last term he comprehends the divine character as far as it is revealed. He was so earnest after the living God that he woke up at dead of night to think upon him. These were David's "Night-Thoughts." If they were not "Sunny Memories" they were memories of the Sun of Righteousness. It is well when our memory furnishes us with consolation, so that we can say with the Psalmist — Having early been taught to know thee, I had only to remember the lessons of thy grace, and my heart was comforted. This verse shows not only that the man of God had remembered, but that he still remembered the Lord his God. We are to hallow the name of God, and we cannot do so if it slips from our memory. ***"And have kept thy law."*** He found sanctification through meditation; by the thoughts of the night he ruled the actions of the day. As the actions of the day often create the dreams of the night, so do the thoughts of the night produce the deeds of the day. If we do not keep the name of God in our memory we shall not keep the law of God in our conduct. Forgetfulness of mind leads up to forgetfulness of life.

When we hear the night-songs of revellers we have in them sure evidence that they do not keep God's law; but the quiet musings of gracious men are proof positive that: the name of the Lord is dear to them. We may judge of nations by their songs, and so we may of men; and in the case of the righteous, their singing and their thinking are both indications of their love to God: whether they lift up their voices, or sit in silence, they are still the Lord's. Blessed are the men whose "night-thoughts" are memories of the eternal

light; they shall be remembered of their Lord when the night of death comes on. Reader, are your thoughts in the dark full of light, because full of God? Is his name the natural subject of your evening reflections? Then it will give a tone to your morning and noonday hours. Or do you give your whole mind to the fleeting cares and pleasures of this world? If so, it is little wonder that you do not live as you ought to do. No man is holy by chance. If we have no memory for the name of Jehovah we are not likely to remember his commandments: if we do not think of him secretly we shall not obey him openly.

**56. “*This I had, because I kept thy precepts.*”**

He had this comfort, this remembrance of God, this power to sing, this courage to face the enemy, this hope in the promise, because he had earnestly observed the commands of God, and striven to walk in them. We are not rewarded for our works, but there is a reward in them. Many a comfort is obtainable only by careful living: we can surely say of such consolations, “***This I had, because I kept thy precepts.***” How can we defy ridicule if we are living inconsistently? How can we comfortably remember the name of the Lord if we live carelessly?

It may be that David means that he had been enabled to keep the law because he had attended to the separate precepts he had taken the commands in detail, and so had reached to holiness of life. He who is not careful of the parts of the law cannot keep it as a whole. Or he may mean that by keeping certain of the precepts he had gained spiritual strength to keep others: for God gives more grace to those who have some measure of it, and those who improve their talents shall find themselves improving. Probably it is best to leave the passage open just as our version does; so that we may say of a thousand priceless blessings, “These came to us in the way of obedience.” All our possessions are the gifts of grace, and yet it is unquestionably true that certain of them come in the shape of reward. Even when good things come to us in this way the reward is not of debt, but of grace. God first works in us good works, and then rewards us for them. This is a complex condescension, a chequer-work of goodness.

In this verse we have an apt conclusion to this section of the psalm, since it contains a strong argument for the prayer with which the section commenced. If we have been helped to remember our Lord's commands we may be sure that he will remember our necessities. The sweet singer had evidence of having kept God's precepts, and therefore he could the more properly beg the Lord to keep his promises. All through the passage we may find pleas, especially in the two remembers. "I have remembered thy judgments," and "*I have remembered thy name;*" "Remember thy word unto thy servant."

### Exposition of verses 57 to 64, Cheth

*57. Thou art my portion, O LORD: I have said that I would keep thy words.*

*58. I intreated thy favour with my whole heart: be merciful unto me according to thy word.*

*59. I thought on my ways, and turned my feet unto thy testimonies.*

*60. I made haste, and delayed not to keep thy commandments.*

*61. The bands of the wicked have robbed me: but I have not forgotten thy law.*

*62. At midnight I will rise to give thanks unto thee because of thy righteous judgments.*

*63. I am a companion of all them that fear thee, and of them that keep thy precepts.*

*64. The earth, O LORD, is full of thy mercy: teach me thy statutes.*

In this section the Psalmist seems to take firm hold upon God himself; appropriating him (57), crying out for him (58), returning to him (59), solacing himself in him (61, 62), associating with his people (63), and sighing for his personal instruction (64). Note how the first verse of this octave is linked to the last of the former one, of which indeed it is an expansion. "*This I had because I kept thy precepts. Thou art my portion, O LORD: I have said that I would keep thy words.*" Being many, these verses are still but one bread.

*57. "Thou art my portion, O Lord : I have said that I would*

*keep thy words.”*

**“Thou art my portion, O Lord.”** A broken expression. The translators have mended it by insertions, but perhaps it had been better to have left it alone, and then it would have appeared as an exclamation — **“My portion, O Lord!”** The poet’s lost in wonder while he sees that the great and glorious God is all his own! Well might he be so, for there is no possession like Jehovah himself. The form of the sentence expresses joyous recognition and appropriation — **“My portions. O Jehovah!”** David had often seen the prey divided, and heard the victor shouting over it; here he rejoices as one who seizes his share of the spoil; he chooses the Lord to be his part of the treasure. Like the Levites, he took God to be his portion, and left other matters to those who coveted them. This is a large and lasting heritage, for it includes all, and more than all, and it outlasts all; and yet no man chooses it for himself until God has chosen and renewed him.

Who that is truly wise could hesitate for a moment when the infinitely blessed God is set before him to be the object of his choice? David leaped at the opportunity, and grasped the priceless boon. Our author here dares exhibit the title-deeds of his portion before the eye of the Lord himself, for he addresses his joyful utterance directly to God, whom he boldly calls his own. With much else to choose from, for he was a king, and a man of great resources, he deliberately turns from all the treasures of the world, and declares that the Lord, even Jehovah, is his portion.

**“I have said that I would keep thy words.”** We cannot always look back with comfort upon what we have said, but in this instance David had spoken wisely and well. He had declared his choice; he preferred the word of God to the wealth of worldlings. It was his firm resolve to keep — that is, treasure up and observe — the words of his God; and as he had aforesaid solemnly expressed it: in the presence of the Lord himself, so here he confesses the binding obligation of his former vow. Jesus said, “If a man love me, he will keep my words,” and this is a case which he might have quoted as an illustration; for the Psalmist’s love to God as his portion led to his keeping the words of God. David took God to be his Prince as well as his Portion. He was confident as to his interest in God, and

therefore he was resolute in his obedience to him. Full assurance is a powerful source of holiness. The very words of God are to be stored up; for whether they relate to doctrine, promise, or precept, they are most precious. When the heart is determined to keep these words, and has registered its purpose in the court of heaven, it is prepared for all the temptations and trials that may befall it; for, with God as its heritage, it is always in good case.

**58. “I intreated thy favour with my whole heart: be merciful unto me according to thy word.”**

**“I intreated thy favour with my whole heart.”** A fully assured possession of God does not set aside prayer, but rather urges us to it; he who knows God to be his God will seek his face, longing for his presence. Seeking God’s presence is the idea conveyed by the marginal reading, “thy face,” and this is true to the Hebrew. The presence of God is the highest form of his favour, and therefore it is the most urgent desire of gracious souls: the light of his countenance gives us an ante past of heaven. Oh that we always enjoyed it! The good man entreated God’s smile as one who begged for his life, and the entire strength of his desire went with the entreaty. Such eager pleadings are sure of success; that which comes from our heart will certainly go to God’s heart. The whole of God’s favours are ready for those who seek them with their whole hearts.

**“Be merciful unto me according to thy word.”** He has entreated favour, and the form in which he most needs it is that of mercy; for he is more a sinner than anything else. He asks nothing beyond the promise, he only begs for such mercy as the word reveals. And what more could he want or wish for? God has revealed such an infinity of mercy in his word, that it would be impossible to conceive of more. See how the Psalmist dwells upon favour and mercy, he never dreams of merit. He does not demand, but entreat; for he feels his own unworthiness. Note how he remains a suppliant, though he knows that he has all things in his God. God is his portion, and yet he begs for a look at his face. The idea of any other position before God than that of an undeserving though favoured one never entered his head. Here we have his **“Be**

*merciful unto me*” rising with as much intensity of humble pleading as if he still remained among the most trembling of penitents. The confidence of faith makes us bold in prayer, but it never teaches us to live without prayer, or justifies us in being other than humble beggars at mercy’s gate.

**59. “*I thought on my ways, and turned my feet unto thy testimonies.*”**

While studying the word he was led to study his own life, and this caused a mighty revolution. He came to the word, and then he came to himself, and this made him arise and go to his Father. Consideration is the commencement of conversion: first we think, and then we turn. When the mind repents of ill ways, the feet are soon led into good ways; but there will be no repenting until there is deep, earnest: thought. Many men are averse to thought of any kind, and as to thought upon their ways, they cannot endure it, for their ways will not bear thinking of. David’s ways had not been all that he could have wished them to be, and so his thoughts were sobered with the pale cast of regret; but he did not end with idle lamentations, he set about a practical amendment; he turned and returned, he sought the testimonies of the Lord, and hastened to enjoy once more the conscious favour of his heavenly Friend. Action without thought is folly, and thought without action is sloth: to think carefully and then to act promptly is a happy combination. He had entreated for renewed fellowship, and now he proved the genuineness of his desire by renewed obedience. If we are in the dark, and mourn an absent God, our wisest method will be not so much to think upon our sorrows as upon our ways: though we cannot turn the course of providence, we can turn the way of our walking, and this will soon mend matters. If we can get our feet right as to holy walking, we shall soon get our hearts right as to happy living. God will turn to his saints when they turn to him; yea, he has already favoured them with the light of his face when they begin to think and turn.

**60. “*I made haste, and delayed not to keep thy commandments.*”**

He made all speed to get back into the royal road from which he

had wandered, and to run in that road upon the King's errands. Speed in repentance and speed in obedience are two excellent things. We are too often in haste to sin. Oh that we may be in a greater hurry to obey! Delay in repentance is increase of sin. To be slow to keep the commands is to break them. There is much evil in a lagging pace when God's command is to be followed. A holy alacrity in service is much to be cultivated. It is wrought in us by the Spirit of God, and the preceding verses describe the method of it: we are made to perceive and mourn our errors, we are led to return to the right path, and then we are eager to make up for lost time by dashing forward to fulfil the precept.

Whatever may be the slips and wanderings of an honest heart, there remains enough of true life in it to produce ardent piety when once it is quickened by the visitations of God. The Psalmist entreated for mercy, and when he received it he became eager and vehement in the Lord's ways. He had always loved them, and hence when he was enriched with grace he displayed great vivacity and delight in them. He made double speed; for positively he "*made haste,*" and negatively he refused to yield to any motive which suggested procrastination — he "*delayed not.*" Thus he made rapid advances and accomplished much service, fulfilling thereby the vow which is recorded in the 57th verse: "I said that I would keep thy words." The commands which he was so eager to obey were not ordinances of man, but precepts of the Most High. Many are zealous to obey custom and society, and yet they are slack in serving God. It is a crying shame that men should be served post-haste, and that God's work should have the go by, or be performed with dreamy negligence.

**61. *"The bands of the wicked have robbed me: but I have not forgotten thy law."***

*"The bands of the wicked have robbed me."* Afore-time they derided him, and now they have defrauded him. Ungodly men grow worse, and become more and more daring, so that they go from ridicule to robbery. Much of this bold opposition arose from their being banded together: men will dare to do in company what they durst not have thought of alone. When firebrands are laid together,

there is no telling what a flame, they will create. It seems that whole bands of men assailed this one child of God; they are cowardly enough for anything: though they could not kill him, they robbed him; the dogs of Satan will worry saints if they cannot devour them. David's enemies did their utmost: first the serpents hissed, and then they stung. Since words availed not, the wicked fell to blows. How much the ungodly have plundered the saints in all ages, and how often have the righteous borne gladly the spoiling of their goods!

***“But I have not forgotten thy law.”*** This was well. Neither his sense of injustice, nor his sorrow at his losses, nor his attempts at defence, diverted him from the ways of God. He would not do wrong to prevent the suffering of wrong, nor do ill to avenge ill. He carried the law in his heart, and therefore no disturbance of mind could take him off from following it. He might have forgotten himself if he had forgotten the law: as it was, he was ready to forgive and forget the injuries done him, for his heart was taken up with the word of God. The bands of the wicked had not robbed him of his choicest treasure, since they had left him his holiness and his happiness.

Some read this passage, “The bands of the wicked environ me.” They hemmed him in, they cut him off from succour, they shut up every avenue of escape; but; the man of God had his protector with him; a clear conscience relied upon the promise, and a brave resolve stuck to the precept. He could not be either bribed or bullied into sin. The cordon of the ungodly could not keep God from him, nor him from God: this was because God was his portion, and none could deprive him of it, either by force or fraud. That is true grace which can endure the test: some are barely gracious among the circle of their friends, but this man was holy amid a ring of foes.

***62. “At midnight I will rise to give thanks unto thee because of thy righteous judgments.”***

He was not afraid of the robbers; he rose, not to watch his house, but to praise his God. Midnight is the hour for burglars, and there were bands of them around David, but they did not occupy his



thoughts; these were all up and away with the Lord his God. He thought not of thieves, but of thanks; not of what they would steal, but of what he would give to his God. A thankful heart is such a blessing that it drives out fear and makes room for praise. Thanksgiving turns night into day, and consecrates all hours to the worship of God. Every hour is canonical to a saint.

The Psalmist: observed posture; he did not lie in bed and praise. There is not much in the position of the body, but there is something, and that something is to be observed whenever it is helpful to devotion and expressive of our diligence: or humility. Many kneel without praying, some pray without kneeling; but the best is to kneel and pray: so here, it would have been no virtue to rise without giving thanks, and it would have been no sin to give thanks without rising; but to rise and give thanks is a happy combination. As for the season, it was quiet, lonely, and such as proved his zeal. At midnight he would be unobserved and undisturbed; it was his own time which he saved from his sleep, and so he would be free from the charge of sacrificing public duties to private devotions. Midnight ends one day and begins another, it was therefore meet to give the solemn moments to communion with the Lord. At the turn of the night he turned to his God. He had thanks to give for mercies which God had given: he had on his mind the truth of verse fifty-seven, "Thou art my portion," and if anything can make a man sing in the middle of the night, that is it.

The righteous doings of the great Judge gladdened the heart of this godly man. His judgments are the terrible side of God, but they have no terror to the righteous; they admire them, and adore the Lord for them: they rise at night to bless God that he will avenge his own elect. Some hate the very notion of divine justice, and in this they are wide as the poles asunder from this man of God, who was filled with joyful gratitude at the memory of the sentences of the Judge of all the earth. Doubtless in the expression, "**thy righteous judgments,**" David refers also to the written judgments of God upon various points of moral conduct; indeed, all the divine precepts may be viewed in that light; they are all of them the legal decisions of the Supreme Arbiter of right and wrong. David was charmed with these judgments. Like Paul, he could say, "I delight

in the law of God after the inward man.” He could not find time enough by day to study the words of divine wisdom, or to bless God for them, and so he gave up his sleep that he might tell out his gratitude for such a law and such a Lawgiver. This verse is an advance upon the sense of verse fifty-two, and contains in addition the essence of fifty-five. Our author never repeats himself: though he runs up and down the same scale, his music has an infinite variety. The permutations and combinations which may be formed in connection with a few vital truths are innumerable.

**63. *“I am a companion of all them that fear thee, and of them that keep thy precepts.”***

***“I am a companion of all them that fear thee.”*** The last verse said, ***“I will,”*** and this says, ***“I am.”*** We can hardly hope to be right in the future unless we are right now. The holy man spent his nights with God and his days with God’s people. Those who fear God love those who fear him, and they make small choice as to the rank of their companions so long as they are truly God-fearing men. David was a king, and yet he consorted with “all” who feared the Lord, whether they were obscure or famous, poor or rich. He was a fellow-commoner of the College of All-saints.

He did not select a few especially eminent saints and leave ordinary believers alone. No, he was glad of the society of those who had only the beginning of wisdom in the shape of “the fear of the Lord:” he was pleased to sit with them on the lower forms of the school of faith. He looked for inward godly fear, but he also expected to see outward piety, in those whom he admitted to his society; hence he adds, ***“and of them that keep thy precepts.”*** If they would keep the Lord’s commands, the Lord’s servant would keep their company. David was known to be on the godly side, he was ever of the Puritanic party: the men of Belial hated him for this, and no doubt despised him for keeping such unfashionable company as that of humble men and women who were strait-laced and religious; but the man of God is by no means ashamed of his associates; so far from this, he even glories to avow his union with them, let his enemies make what they can of it. He found both pleasure and profit in saintly society; he grew better by consorting

with the good, and derived honour from keeping right honourable company. What says the reader? Does he relish holy society? Is he at home among gracious people? If so, he may derive comfort from the fact. Birds of a feather flock together. A man is known by his company. Those who have no fear of God before their eyes seldom desire the society of saints; it is too slow, too dull for them. Be this our comfort, that when we are let go by death we shall go to our own company and those who loved the saints on earth shall be numbered with them in heaven.

There is a measure of parallelism between this seventh of its octave and the seventh of 'TETH' (71) and of 'JOD' (79); but, as a rule, the similarities which were so manifest in earlier verses are now becoming dim. As the sense deepens, the artificial form of expression is less regarded.

**64. "The earth, O Lord, is full of thy mercy: teach me thy statutes."**

*"The earth, O Lord, is full of thy mercy."* David had been exiled, but he had never been driven beyond the range of mercy, for he found the world to be everywhere filled with it. He had wandered in deserts and hidden in caves, and there he had seen and felt the loving-kindness of the Lord. He had learned that far beyond the bounds of the land of promise and the race of Israel the love of Jehovah extended, and in this verse he expressed that large-hearted idea of God which is so seldom seen in the modern Jew.

How sweet it is to us to know that not only is there mercy all over the world, but there is such an abundance of it that the earth is *"full"* of it! It is little wonder that the Psalmist, since he knew the Lord to be his portion, hoped to obtain a measure of his mercy for himself. He desired to know more of one so good; and as the Lord has so freely revealed himself in nature, he felt encouraged to pray, *"teach me thy statutes."* It was to him the *beau-ideal* of mercy to be taught of God, and taught in God's own law. He could not think of a greater mercy than this. Surely, he who fills the universe with his grace will grant such a request as this to his own child, Let us breathe the desire to the All-merciful Jehovah, and we may be assured of its fulfilment.

The first verse of this eight is fragrant with full assurance and strong resolve, and this last verse overflows with a sense of the divine fullness, and of the Psalmist's personal dependence. This is an illustration of the fact that: full assurance neither damps prayer nor hinders humility. It would be no error if we said that it creates lowliness and suggests supplication. ***“Thou art my portion, O Lord,”*** is well followed by ***“teach me;”*** for the heir of a great estate should be thoroughly educated, that his behaviour may comport with his fortune. What manner of disciples ought we to be whose inheritance is the Lord of hosts! Those who have God for their Portion long to have him for their Teacher. Moreover, those who have resolved to obey are the most eager to be taught. “I have said that I would keep thy words” is beautifully succeeded by ***“teach me thy statutes.”*** Those who wish to keep a law are anxious to know all its clauses and provisions, lest they should offend through inadvertence. He who does not care to be instructed of the Lord has never honestly resolved to be holy.

### **Exposition of verses 65 to 72, Teth**

***65. Thou hast dealt well with thy servant, O Lord, according unto thy word.***

***66. Teach me good judgment and knowledge: for I have believed thy commandments.***

***67. Before I was afflicted I went astray: but now have I kept thy word.***

***68. Thou art good, and doest good; teach me thy statutes.***

***69. The proud have forged a lie against me: but I will keep thy precepts with my whole heart.***

***70. Their heart is as fat as grease; but I delight in thy law.***

***71. It is good for me that I have been afflicted; that I might learn thy statutes.***

***72. The law of thy mouth is better unto me than thousands of gold and silver.***

In this ninth section the verses in the Hebrew all begin with the letter ‘TETH.’ In our own version they all commence with the letter T, except 67 and 71, and these can easily be made to do so by

reading, “Till I was afflicted,” and, “Tis good for me.” These verses are the tributes of experience, testifying to the goodness of God, the graciousness of his dealings, and the preciousness of his word. Especially the Psalmist proclaims the excellent uses of adversity and the goodness of God in afflicting him. The sixty-fifth verse is the text of the entire octave.

**65. “*Thou hast dealt well with thy servant, O Lord, according unto thy word.*”**

This is the summary of his life, and assuredly it is the sum of ours. The Psalmist tells the Lord the verdict of his heart; he cannot be silent, he must speak his gratitude in the presence of Jehovah, his God. From the universal goodness of God in nature, in verse 64, it is an easy and pleasant step to a confession of the Lord’s uniform goodness to ourselves personally. It is something that God has dealt at all with such insignificant and undeserving beings as we are; and it is far more that he has dealt well with us, and so well, so wondrously well. He hath done all things well: the rule has no exception. In providence and in grace, in giving prosperity and in sending adversity, in everything Jehovah hath dealt well with us. It is dealing well on our part to tell the Lord that we feel that he hath dealt well with us; for praise of this kind is specially fitting and comely. This kindness of the Lord is, however, no chance matter: he promised to do so, and he has done it according to his word. It is very precious to see the word of the Lord fulfilled in our happy experience; it endears the Scripture to us, and makes us love the Lord of the Scripture. The book of providence tallies with the book of promise: what we read in the page of inspiration we meet with again in the leaves of our life-story. We may not have thought that it would be so; but our unbelief is repented of now that we see the mercy of the Lord to us, and his faithfulness to his word; henceforth we are bound to display a firmer faith both in God and in his promise. He has spoken well, and he has dealt well. He is the best of Masters; for it is to very unworthy and incapable servants that he has acted thus graciously: does not this cause us to delight in his service more and more? We cannot say that we have dealt well with our Master; for when we have done all, we are

unprofitable servants; but as for our Lord, he has given us light work, large maintenance, loving encouragement, and liberal wages. It is a wonder that he has not long ago discharged us, or at least reduced our allowances, or handled us roughly; yet we have had no hard dealings, all has been ordered with as much consideration as if we had rendered perfect obedience. We have had bread enough and to spare, our livery has been duly supplied, and his service has ennobled us and made us happy as kings. Complaints we have none. We lose ourselves in adoring thanksgiving, and find ourselves again in careful thanks living.

**66. *“Teach me good judgment and knowledge: for I have believed thy commandments.”***

***“Teach me good judgment and knowledge.”*** Again he begs for teaching, as in verse 64, and again he uses God’s mercy as an argument. Since God had dealt well with him, he is encouraged to pray for judgment to appreciate the Lord’s goodness. The gift of good judgment is a form of goodness which the godly man most needs and most desires, and it is one which the Lord is most ready to bestow. David felt that he had frequently failed in judgment in the matter of the Lord’s dealings with him: from want of knowledge he had misjudged the chastening hand of the heavenly Father, and, therefore he now asks to be better instructed, since he perceives the injustice which he had done to the Lord by his hasty conclusions. He means to say — Lord, thou didst deal well with me when I thought thee hard and stern; be pleased to give me more wit, that I may not a second time think so ill of my Lord. A sight of our errors and a sense of our ignorance should make us teachable. We are not able to judge, for our knowledge is sadly inaccurate and imperfect; if the Lord teaches us knowledge, we shall attain to good judgment, but not otherwise. The Holy Ghost alone can fill us with light, and set our understanding upon a proper balance: let us ardently long for his teachings, since it is most desirable that we should be no longer mere children in knowledge and understanding.

***“For I have believed thy commandments.”*** His heart was right, and therefore he hoped his head would be made right. He had faith,

and therefore he hoped to receive wisdom. His mind had been settled in the conviction that the precepts of the word were from the Lord, and were therefore just, wise, kind, and profitable. He believed in holiness, and as that belief is no mean work of grace, upon the soul, he looked for yet further operations of divine grace. He who believes the commands is the man to know and understand the doctrines and the promises. If in looking back upon our mistakes and ignorances, we can yet see that we heartily love the precepts of the divine will, we have good reason to hope that we are Christ's disciples, and that he will teach us and make us men of good judgment and sound knowledge. A man who has learned discernment by experience, and has thus become a man of sound judgment, is a valuable member of a church, and the means of much edification to others. Let all who would be greatly useful offer the prayer of this verse: *“teach me good judgment and knowledge.”*

**67. *“Before I was afflicted I went astray: but now have I kept thy word”***

*“Before I was afflicted I went astray.”* Partly perhaps, through the absence of trial. Often our trials act as a thorn-hedge to keep us in the good pasture; but our prosperity is a gap through which we go astray. If any of us remember a time in which we had no trouble, we also probably recollect that then grace was low, and temptation was strong. It may be that some believer cries, “Oh that it were with me as in those summer days before I was afflicted!” Such a sigh is most unwise, and arises from a carnal love of ease: the spiritual man who prizes growth in grace will bless God that those dangerous days are over, and that if the weather be more stormy it is also more healthy. It is well when the mind is open and candid, as in this instance: perhaps David would never have known and confessed his own strayings if he had not smarted under the rod. Let us join in his humble acknowledgments, for doubtless we have imitated him in his strayings. Why is it that a little ease works in us so much disease? Can we never rest without rusting? Never be filled without waxing fat? Never rise as to one world without going down as to another? What weak creatures we are to be unable to

bear a little pleasure! What base hearts are those which turn the abundance of God's goodness into an occasion for sin!

***“But now have I kept thy word.”*** Grace is in that heart which profits by its chastening. It is of no use to plough barren soil when there is no spiritual life, affliction works no spiritual benefit; but where the heart is sound, trouble awakens conscience, wandering is confessed, the soul becomes again obedient to the command, and continues to be so. Whipping will not turn a rebel into a child; but to the true child a touch of the rod is a sure corrective. In the Psalmist's case the medicine of affliction worked a change — “but;” an immediate change — “now;” a lasting change — “have I;” an inward change — “have I kept;” a change Godward — “thy word.” Before his trouble he wandered, but after it he kept within the hedge of the word, and found good pasture for his soul: the trial tethered him to his proper place; it kept him, and then he kept God's word. Sweet are the uses of adversity, and this is one of them: it puts a bridle upon transgression, and furnishes a spur for holiness.

**68. *“Thou art good, and doest good; teach me thy statutes.”***

***“Thou art good, and doest good.”*** Even in affliction God is good, and does good. This is the confession of experience. God is essential goodness in himself, and in every attribute of his nature he is good in the fullest sense of the term; indeed, he has a monopoly of goodness, for there is none good but one, that is God. His acts are according to his nature: from a pure source flow pure streams. God is not latent and inactive goodness; he displays himself by his doings, he is actively beneficent, he does good. How much good he does no tongue can tell. How good he is no heart can conceive! It is well to worship the Lord as the poet here does by describing him. Facts about God are the best praise of God. All the glory we can give to God is to reflect his own glory upon himself. We can say no more good of God than God is and does. We believe in his goodness and so honour him by our faith; we admire that goodness, and so glorify him by our love; we declare that goodness, and so magnify him by our testimony.

***“Teach me thy statutes.”*** The same prayer as before, backed



with the same argument. He prays, "Lord be good, and do good to me, that I may both be good and do good through thy teaching." The man of God was a learner, and delighted to learn: he ascribed this to the goodness of the Lord, and hoped that for the same reason he would be allowed to remain in the school and learn on till he could perfectly practice every lesson. His chosen class-book was the royal statutes; he wanted no other. He knew the sad result of breaking those statutes, and by a painful experience he had been led back to the way of righteousness; and therefore he begged, as the greatest possible instance of the divine goodness, that he might be taught a perfect knowledge of the law, and a complete conformity to it. He who mourns that he has not kept the word longs to be taught it; and he who rejoices that by grace he has been taught to keep it, is not less anxious for the like instruction to be continued to him.

In verse 12, which is the fourth verse of 'BETH,' we have much the same sense as in this fourth verse of 'TETH.'

**69. *"The proud have forged a lie against me: but I will keep thy precepts with my whole heart."***

*"The proud have forged a lie against me."* They first derided him (51), and then defrauded him (61), and now they have defamed him. To injure his character they resorted to falsehood, for they could find nothing against him if they spoke the truth. They forged a lie as a blacksmith beats out a weapon of iron, or they counterfeited the truth as men forge false coin. The original may suggest a common expression — "They have patched up a lie against me." They were not too proud to lie. Pride is a lie; and when a proud man utters lies "he speaketh of his own." Proud men are usually the bitterest opponents of the righteous: they are envious of their good name, and are eager to ruin it. Slander is a cheap and handy weapon if the object is the destruction of a gracious reputation; and when many proud ones conspire to concoct, exaggerate, and spread abroad a malicious falsehood, they generally succeed in wounding their victim, and it is no fault of theirs if they do not kill him out right. Oh the venom which lies under the tongue of a liar! Many a happy life has been embittered

by it, and many a good repute has been poisoned as with the deadliest drug. It is painful to the last degree to hear unscrupulous men hammering away at the devil's anvil forging a new calumny; the only help against it is the sweet promise, "No weapon that is formed against thee shall prosper, and every tongue that riseth against thee in judgment thou shalt condemn."

***"But I will keep thy precepts with my whole heart."*** My one anxiety shall be to mind my own business, and stick to the commandments of the Lord. If the mud which is thrown at us does not blind our eyes or bruise our integrity, it will do us little harm. If we keep the precepts, the precepts will keep us in the day of contumely and slander. David renews his resolve — ***"I will keep;"*** he takes a new look at the commands, and sees them to be really the Lord's — ***"thy precepts;"*** and he arouses his entire nature to the work — "with my whole heart." When slanders drive us to more resolute and careful obedience they work our lasting good; falsehood hurled against us may be made to promote our fidelity to the truth, and the malice of men may increase our love to God. If we try to answer lies by our words we may be beaten in the battle; but a holy life is an unanswerable refutation of all calumnies. Spite is balked if we persevere in holiness despite all opposition.

**70. *"Their, heart is as fat as grease; but I delight in thy law."***

***"Their heart is as fat as grease."*** They delight in fatness, but I delight in thee. Their hearts, through sensual indulgence, have grown insensible, coarse, and grovelling; but thou hast saved me from such a fate through thy chastening hand. Proud men grow fat through carnal luxuries, and this makes them prouder still. They riot in their prosperity, and fill their hearts therewith till they become insensible, effeminate, and self-indulgent. A greasy heart is something horrible; it is a fatness which makes a man fatuous, a fatty degeneration of the heart which leads to feebleness and death. The fat in such men is killing the life in them. Dryden wrote,

***"O souls! In whom no heavenly fire is found,  
Fat minds and ever grovelling on the ground."***

In this condition men have no heart except for luxury, their very

being seems to swim and stew in the fat of cookery and banqueting. Living on the fat of the land, their nature is subdued to that which they have fed upon; the muscle of their nature has gone to softness and grease.

***“But I delight in thy law.”*** How much better is it to joy in the law of the Lord than to joy in sensual indulgences! This makes the heart healthy, and keeps the mind lowly. No one who loves holiness has the slightest cause to envy the prosperity of the worldling. Delight in the law elevates and ennobles, while carnal pleasure clogs the intellect and degrades the affections. There is and always ought to be a vivid contrast between the believer and the sensualist, and that contrast is as much seen in the affections of the heart as in the actions of the life: their heart is as fat as grease, and our heart is delighted with the law of the Lord. Our delights are a better test of our character than anything else: as a man’s heart is, so is the man. David oiled the wheels of life with his delight in God’s law, and not with the fat of sensuality. He had his relishes and dainties, his festivals and delights, and all these he found in doing the will of the Lord his God. When law becomes delight, obedience is bliss. Holiness in the heart causes the soul to eat the fat of the land. To have the law for our delight will breed in our hearts the very opposite of the effects of pride: deadness, sensuality, and obstinacy will be cured, and we shall become teachable, sensitive, and spiritual. How careful should we be to live under the influence of the divine law, that we fall not under the law of sin and death!

**71. *“It is good for me that I have been afflicted; that I might learn thy statutes.”***

***“It is good for me that I have been afflicted”*** Even though the affliction came from bad men, it was over-ruled for good ends; though it was bad as it came from them, it was good for David. It benefited him in many ways, and he knew it. Whatever he may have thought while under the trial, he perceived himself to be the better for it when it was over. It was not good to the proud to be prosperous, for their hearts grew sensual and insensible; but affliction was good for the Psalmist. Our worst is better for us than

the sinner's best. It is bad for sinners to rejoice, and good for saints to sorrow. A thousand benefits have come to us through our pains and griefs, and among the rest is this — that we have thus been schooled in the law.

***“That I might learn thy statutes.”*** These we have come to know and to keep by feeling the smart of the rod. We prayed the, Lord to teach us (66), and now we see how he has already been doing it. Truly he has dealt well with us, for he has dealt wisely with us. We have been kept from the ignorance of the greasy-hearted by our trials, and this, if there were nothing else, is just cause for constant gratitude. To be larded by prosperity is not good for the proud; but for the truth to be learned by adversity is good for the humble. Very little is to be learned without affliction. If we would be scholars we must be sufferers. As the Latins say, *Experientia docet*, experience teaches. There is no royal road to learning the royal statutes; God's commands are best read by eyes wet with tears.

***72. The law of thy mouth is better unto me than thousands of gold and silver.”***

***“The law of thy mouth.”*** A sweetly expressive name for the word of God. It comes from God's own mouth with freshness and power to our souls. Things written are as dried herbs; but speech has a liveliness and dew about it. We do well to look upon the word of the Lord as though it were newly spoken into our ear; for in very truth it is not decayed by years, but is as forcible and sure as though newly uttered. Precepts are prized when it is seen that they come forth from the lips of our Father who is in heaven. The same lips which spoke us into existence have spoken the law by which we are to govern that existence. Whence could a law so sweetly proceed as from the mouth of our covenant God? Well may we prize beyond all price that which comes from such a source!

***“Is better unto me than thousands of gold and silver.”*** If a poor man had said this, the world's witlings would have hinted that the grapes are sour, and that men who have no wealth are the first to despise it; but this is the verdict of a man who owned his thousands, and could judge by actual experience of the value of money and the value of truth. He speaks of great riches, he heaps it

up by thousands, he mentions the varieties of its forms — “ gold and silver;” and then he sets the word of God before it all, as better to him, even if others did not think it better to them. Wealth is good in some respects, but obedience is better in all respects. It is well to keep the treasures of this life; but far more commendable to keep the law of the Lord. The law is better than gold and silver, for these may be stolen from us, but not the word; these take to themselves wings, but the word of God remains; these are useless in the hour of death, but then it is that the promise is most dear. Instructed Christians recognize the value of the Lord’s word, and warmly express it, not only in their testimony to their fellow-men, but in their devotions to God. It is a sure sign of a heart which has learned God’s statutes when it prizes them above all earthly possessions; and it is an equally certain mark of grace when the precepts of Scripture are as precious as its promises. The Lord cause us thus to prize the law of his mouth.

See how this portion of the Psalm is flavoured with goodness. God’s dealings are good (65), holy judgment is good (66), affliction is good (67), God is good (68), and here the law is not: only good, but better than the best of treasure. Lord, make us good, through thy good word! Amen.

### **Exposition of verses 73 to 80, Jod**

*73. Thy hand have made me and fashioned me: give me understanding, that I may learn thy commandments.*

*74. They that fear thee will be glad when they see me; because I have hoped in thy word.*

*75. I know, O LORD, that thy judgments are right, and that thou in faithfulness hast afflicted me.*

*76. Let, I pray thee, thy merciful kindness be for my comfort, according to thy word unto thy servant.*

*77. Let thy tender mercies come unto me, that I may live: for thy law is my delight.*

*78. Let the proud be ashamed; for they dealt perversely with me without a cause: but I will meditate in thy precepts.*

*79. Let those that fear thee turn unto me, and those that have known thy testimonies.*

**80. *Let my heart be sound in thy statutes; that I be not ashamed.***

We have now come to the tenth portion, which in each stanza begins with ‘JOD;’ but it certainly does not treat of jots and tittles and other trifles. Its subject would seem to be personal experience and its attractive influence upon others. The prophet is in deep sorrow, but looks to be delivered and made a blessing. Endeavouring to teach, the Psalmist first seeks to be taught (verse 73), persuades himself that he will be well received (74), and then repeats the testimony which he intends to bear (75). He prays for more experience (76, 77), for the baffling of the proud (78), for the gathering together of the godly to him (79), and for himself again, that he may be fully equipped for his witness-bearing, and may be sustained in it (80). This is the anxious yet hopeful cry of one who is heavily afflicted by cruel adversaries, and therefore makes his appeal to God as his only friend.

**73. *“Thy hands have made me and fashioned me: give me understanding that I may learn thy commandments”***

***“Thy hands have made me and fashioned me.”*** It is profitable to remember our creation; it is pleasant to see that the divine hand has had much to do with us; for it never moves apart from the divine thought. It excites reverence, gratitude, and affection towards God when we view him as our Maker, putting forth the careful skill and power of his hands in our forming and fashioning. He took a personal interest in us, making us with his own hands; he was doubly thoughtful, for he is represented both as making and moulding us. In both giving existence and arranging existence the Lord manifested love and wisdom; and therefore we find reasons for praise, confidence, and expectation in our being and well-being.

***“Give me understanding, that I may learn thy commandments.”*** As thou hast made me, teach me. Here is the vessel which thou hast fashioned; Lord, fill it. Thou hast given me both soul and body; grant me now thy grace that my soul may know thy will, and my body may join in the performance of it. The plea is very forcible; it is an enlargement of the cry, “Forsake not the, work of thine own hands.” Without understanding the divine law and rendering

obedience to it, we are imperfect and useless; but we may reasonably hope that the great Potter will complete his work, and give the finishing touch to it, by imparting to us sacred knowledge and holy character. If God had roughly made us, and had not also elaborately fashioned us, this argument would lose much of its force; but surely from the delicate art and marvellous skill which the Lord has shown in the formation of the human body, we may infer that he is prepared to take equal pains with the soul, till it shall perfectly bear his image.

A man without a mind is an idiot, the mere mockery of a man; and a mind without grace is wicked, the sad perversion of a mind. We pray that we may not be left without spiritual judgment or understanding: this the Psalmist sought in verse 66, and he here pleads for it again: there is no true knowing and keeping of the commandments without it. Fools can sin; but only those who are taught of God can be holy. We often speak of gifted men; but he has the best gifts to whom God has given a sanctified understanding wherewith to know and prize the ways of the Lord. Note well that David's prayer for understanding is not for the sake of speculative knowledge, and the gratification of his curiosity: he desires an enlightened judgment, that he may learn God's commandments, and so become obedient and holy. This is the best of learning. A man may abide in the College: where this science is taught all his days, and yet cry out for ability to learn more. The commandment of God is exceeding broad, and so it affords scope for the most vigorous and instructed mind: in fact, no man has by nature an understanding capable of compassing so wide a field, and hence the prayer, "***Give me understanding;***" — as much as to say — I can learn other things with the mind I have, but thy law is so pure, so perfect, spiritual and sublime, that I need to have my mind enlarged before I can become proficient in it. He appeals to his Maker to do this, as if he felt that no power short of that which made him could make him wise unto holiness. We need a new creation, and who can grant us this but the Creator himself? He who made us to live must make us to learn; he who gave us power to stand must give us grace to understand. Let us each one breathe to heaven the prayer of this verse ere we advance a step further; for

we shall be lost even in these petitions unless we pray our way through them, and cry to God for understanding.

**74. *“They that fear thee will be glad when they see me; because I have hoped in thy word.”***

When a man of God obtains grace for himself he becomes a blessing to others, especially if that grace has made him a man of sound understanding and holy knowledge.

God-fearing men are encouraged when they meet with experienced believers. A hopeful man is a God-send when things are declining or in danger. When the hopes of one believer are fulfilled, his companions are cheered and established, and led to hope also. It is good for the eyes to see a man whose witness is that the Lord is true; it is one of the joys of saints to hold converse with their more advanced brethren. The fear of God is not a left-handed grace, as some have called it; it is quite consistent with gladness; for if even the sight of a comrade gladdens the God-fearing, how glad must they be in the presence of the Lord himself! We do not only meet to share each other’s burdens, but to partake in each other’s joys, gracious men contribute largely to the stock of mutual gladness. Hopeful men bring gladness with them. Despondent spirits spread the infection of depression, and hence few are glad to see them; while those whose hopes are grounded upon God’s word carry sunshine in their faces, and are welcomed by their fellows. When professors by their freezing words chill all hearts; the godly avoid their company. May this never be our character!

**75. *“I know, O LORD, that thy judgments are right, and that thou in faithfulness hast afflicted me.”***

***“I know, O LORD, that thy judgments are right.”*** He who would learn more must be thankful for what he already knows, and be willing to confess it to the glory of God. The Psalmist had been sorely tried, but he had continued to hope in God under his trial, and now he avows his conviction that he had been justly and wisely chastened. This he not only thought but knew, so that he was positive about it, and spoke without a moment’s hesitation. Saints are sure about the rightness of their troubles, even when they



cannot see the intent of them. It made the godly glad to hear David say this,

***“And that thou in faithfulness hast afflicted me.”*** Because love required severity, therefore the Lord exercised it. It was not because God was unfaithful that the believer found himself in a sore strait, but for just the opposite reason: it was the faithfulness of God to his covenant which brought the chosen one under the rod. It might not be needful that others should be tried just then; but it was necessary to the Psalmist, and therefore the Lord did not withhold the blessing. Our heavenly Father is no Eli: he will not suffer his children to sin without rebuke; his love is too intense for that. The man who makes the confession of this verse is already progressing in the school of grace, and is learning the commandments.

This third verse of the section corresponds to the third of ‘TETH’ (67), and in a degree to several other verses which make the thirds in their octaves.

***76. “Let, I pray thee, thy merciful kindness be for my comfort, according to thy word unto thy servant.”***

Having confessed the righteousness of the Lord, he now appeals to his mercy, and while he does not ask that the rod may be removed, he earnestly begs for comfort under it. Righteousness and faithfulness afford us no consolation if we cannot also taste of mercy, and, blessed be God, this is promised us in the word, and therefore we may expect it. The words ***“merciful kindness”*** are a happy combination, and express exactly what we need in affliction: mercy to forgive the sin, and kindness to sustain under the sorrow. With these we can be comfortable in the cloudy and dark day, and without them we are wretched indeed; for these, therefore, let us pray unto the Lord, whom we have grieved by our sin, and let us plead the word of his grace as our sole reason for expecting his favour. Blessed be his name, notwithstanding our faults we are still his servants, and we serve a compassionate Master. Some read the last clause, “according to thy saying unto thy servant;” some special saying of the Lord was remembered and pleaded: can we not remember some such “faithful saying,” and make it the groundwork of our petitioning? That phrase, ***“according to thy***

*word,*” is a very favourite one; it shows the motive for mercy and the manner of mercy. Our prayers are according to the mind of God when they are according to the word of God.

77. *“Let thy tender mercies come unto me, that I may live: for thy law is my delight.”*

*“Let thy tender mercies come unto me, that I may live.”* He was so hard pressed that he was at death’s door if God did not succour him. He needed not only mercy, but *“mercies,”* and these must be of a very gracious and considerate kind, even *“tender mercies,”* for he was sore with his wounds. These gentle favours must be of the Lord’s giving, for nothing less would suffice; and they must *“come”* all the way to the sufferer’s heart, for he was not able to journey after them; all he could do was to sigh out, “Oh that they would come!” If deliverance did not soon come, he felt ready to expire; and yet he told us but a verse or so ago that he hoped in God’s word: how true it is that hope lives on when death seems written on all besides! A heathen said, “*dum spiro spero,*” while I breathe I hope; but the Christian can say, “*dum expiro spero,*” even when I expire I still expect the blessing. Yet no true child of God can live without the tender mercy of the Lord; it is death to him to be under God’s displeasure. Notice, again, the happy combination of the words of our English version. Was there ever a sweeter sound than this — *“tender mercies?”* He who has been grievously afflicted, and yet tenderly succoured, is the only man who knows the meaning of such choice language.

How truly we live when tender mercy comes to us! Then we do not merely exist, but live; we are lively, full of life, vivacious, and vigorous. We know not what life is till we know God. Some are said to die by the visitation of God, but we live by it.

*“For thy law is my delight.”* O blessed faith. He is no mean believer who rejoices in the law even when its broken precepts cause him to suffer. To delight in the word when it rebukes us, is proof that we are profiting under it. Surely this is a plea which will prevail with God, however bitter our grief’s may be; if we still delight in the law of the Lord he cannot let us die, he must and ‘will cast a tender look upon us, and comfort our hearts.

**78. “Let the proud be ashamed; for they dealt perversely with me without a cause: but I will meditate in thy precepts.”**

**“Let the proud be ashamed.”** He begged that the judgments of God might no longer fall upon himself, but upon his cruel adversaries. God will not suffer those who hope in his word to be put to shame, for he reserves that reward for haughty spirits: they shall yet be overtaken with confusion, and become the subjects of contempt, while God’s afflicted ones shall again lift up their heads. Shame is for the proud, for it is a shameful thing; to be proud. Shame is not for the holy, for there is nothing in holiness to be ashamed of.

**“For they dealt perversely with me without a cause.”** Their malice was wanton, he had not provoked them. Falsehood was employed to forge an accusation against him; they had to bend his actions out of their true shape before they could assail his character. Evidently the Psalmist keenly felt the malice of his foes. His consciousness of innocence with regard to them created a burning sense of injustice, and he appealed to the righteous Lord to take his part and clothe his false accusers with shame. Probably he mentioned them as **“the proud;”** because he knew that the Lord always takes vengeance on proud men, and vindicates the cause of those whom they oppress. Sometimes he mentions the proud, and sometimes the wicked, but he always means the same persons; the words are interchangeable: he who is proud is sure to be wicked, and proud persecutors are, the worst of wicked men.

**“But I will meditate in thy precepts.”** He would leave the proud in God’s hands, and give himself up to holy studies and contemplations. To obey the divine precepts we have need to know them, and think much of them; hence, this persecuted saint felt that meditation must be his chief employment. He would study the law of God, and not the law of retaliation. The proud are not worth a thought. The worst injury they can do us is to take us away from our devotions; let us baffle them by keeping all the closer to our God when they are most malicious in their onslaughts.

In a similar position to this we have met with the proud in another octave, and shall meet them yet again. They are evidently a

great plague to the Psalmist, but he rises above them.

**79. “*Let those that fear thee turn unto me, and those that have known thy testimonies.*”**

Perhaps the tongue of slander had alienated some of the godly, and probably the actual faults of David had grieved many more. He begs God to turn to him, and then to turn his people towards him. Those who are right with God are also anxious to be right with his children. David craved the love and sympathy of gracious men of all grades — of those who were beginners in grace, and of those who were mature in piety — “*those that fear thee,*” and “*those that have known thy testimonies.*” We cannot afford to lose the love of the least of the saints; and if we have lost their esteem we may most properly pray to have it restored. David was the leader of the godly party in the nation, and it wounded him to the heart when he perceived that those who feared God were not as glad to see him as aforesaid they had been. He did not bluster, and say that if they could do without him he could very well do without them; but he so deeply felt the value of their sympathy, that he made it a matter of prayer that the Lord would turn their hearts to him again. Those who are dear to God, and are instructed in his word, should be very precious in our eyes, and we should do our utmost to be upon good terms with them.

David has two descriptions for the saints: they are God-fearing and God-knowing. They possess both devotion and instruction; they have both the spirit and the science of true religion. We know some believers who are gracious, but not intelligent; and, on the other hand, we also know certain professors who have all head and no heart: he is the man who combines devotion with intelligence. We neither care for devout dunces nor for intellectual icebergs. When fearing and knowing walk hand in hand they cause men to be thoroughly furnished unto every good work. If those choice spirits who both love God and learn of God are my favourite companions I may hope that I am one of their order. Grant, O Lord, that such persons ever turn to me because they find in me congenial company!

**80. “Let my heart be sound in thy statutes: that I be not ashamed.”**

This is even more important than to be held in esteem by good men. This is the root of the matter. If the heart be sound in obedience to God, all is well, or will be well. If right at heart we are right in the main. If we be not sound before God, our name for piety is an empty sound. Mere profession will fail, and undeserved esteem will disappear like a bubble: when it bursts; only sincerity and truth will endure in the evil day. He who is right at heart has no reason for shame, and he never shall have any. Hypocrites ought to be ashamed now, and they shall one day be put to shame without end: their hearts are rotten, and their names shall rot. This eightieth verse is a variation of the prayer of the seventy-third verse; there the Psalmist sought sound understanding, here he goes deeper, and begs for a sound heart. Those who have learned their own frailty by sad experience, are led to dive beneath the surface, and cry to the Lord for truth in the inward parts. In closing the consideration of these eight verses, let us join with the writer in the prayer, **“Let my heart be sound in thy statutes.”**

The third of six booklets.

