

ALEPH - TAU

**THE
GOLDEN
ALPHABET**

**PART TWO
PSALM 119:17-48**



C. H. Spurgeon

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The Golden Alphabet — Part Two — Psalm 119:17-48

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Exposition of verses 17 to 24, Gimel

17. *Deal bountifully with thy servant, that I may live, and keep thy word.*

18. *Open thou mine eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of thy law.*

19. *I am a stranger in the earth: hide not thy commandments from me.*

20. *My soul breaketh for the longing that it hath unto thy judgments at all times.*

21. *Thou hast rebuked the proud that are cursed, which do err from thy commandments.*

22. *Remove from me reproach and contempt; for I have kept thy testimonies.*

23. *Princes also did sit and speak against me: but thy servant did meditate in thy statutes.*

24. *Thy testimonies also are my delight and my counsellors.*

In this section the trials of the way appear to be manifest to the Psalmist's mind, and he prays accordingly for the help which will meet his case, As in the last eight verses he prayed as a youth newly come into the world, so here he pleads as a servant, and a pilgrim, who growingly finds himself to be a stranger in an enemy's country. His appeal is to God alone, and his prayer is specially direct and personal. He speaks with the Lord as a man speaketh with his friend.

17. *“Deal bountifully with thy servant, that I may live, and keep thy word.”*

“Deal bountifully with thy servant.” He takes pleasure in owning his duty to God, and counts it the joy of his heart to be in the service of his God. Out of his condition he makes a plea, for a servant has some hold upon a master; but in this case the wording of the plea shuts out the idea of legal claim, since he seeks bounty rather than reward. Let my wage be according to thy goodness, and not according to my merit. Reward me according to the largeness of thy

liberality, and not according to the scantiness of my service. The hired servants of our Father have all of them bread enough and to spare, and he will not leave one of his household to perish with hunger. If the Lord will only treat us as he treats the least of his servants we may be well content; for all his true servants are sons, princes of the blood, and heirs of life eternal. David felt that his great needs required a bountiful provision, and that his little desert would never earn such a supply; hence he must throw himself upon God's grace, and look for the great things he needed—from the great goodness of the Lord. He begs for a liberality of grace, after the fashion of one who prayed, “O Lord, thou must give me great mercy or no mercy, for little mercy will not serve my turn.”

“*That I may live.*” Without abundant mercy he could not live. It takes great grace to keep a saint alive. Even life is a gift of divine bounty to such undeserving ones as we are. Only the Lord can keep us in being, and it is mighty grace which preserves to us the life which we have forfeited by our sin. It is right to desire to live, it is meet to pray to live, it is just to ascribe prolonged life to the favour of God. Spiritual life, without which this natural life is mere existence, is also to be sought of the Lord's bounty; for it is the noblest work of divine grace, and in it the bounty of God is gloriously displayed. The Lord's servants cannot serve him in their own strength, for they cannot even live unless his grace abounds towards them.

“*And keep thy word.*” This should be the rule, the object, and the joy of our life. We may not wish to live and sin; but we may pray to live and keep God's word. Being is a poor thing if it be not well-being. Life is only worth keeping while we can keep God's word; indeed, there is no life in the highest sense apart from holiness: life while we break the law is but a name to live.

The prayer of this verse shows that it is only through divine bounty or grace that we can live as faithful servants of God, and manifest obedience to his commands. If we give God service it must be because he gives us grace. *We work for* him because he works *in* us. Thus we may make a chain out of the opening verses of the three first octaves of this psalm: verse 1 blesses the holy man, verse 9 asks how we can attain to such holiness, and verse 17

traces such holiness to its secret source, and shows us how to seek the blessing. The more a man prizes holiness, and the more earnestly he strives after it, the more will he be driven towards God for help therein; for he will plainly perceive that his own strength is insufficient, and that he cannot even so much as live without the bounteous assistance of the Lord his God.

18. “*Open thou mine eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of thy law.*”

“*Open thou mine eyes.*” This is a part of the bountiful dealing which he has asked for; no bounty is greater than that which benefits our person, our soul, our mind, and benefits it in so important an organ as the eye. It is far better to have the eyes opened than to be placed in the midst of the noblest prospects and remain blind to their beauty.

“*That I may behold wondrous things out of thy law.*” Some men can perceive no wonders in the gospel, but David felt sure that there were glorious things in the law: he had not half the Bible, but he prized it more than some men prize the whole. He felt that God had laid up great beauties and bounties in his word, and he begs for power to perceive, appreciate, and enjoy the same. We need not so much that God should give us more benefits, as the ability to see what he has given.

The prayer implies a conscious darkness, a dimness of spiritual vision, a powerlessness to remove that defect, and a full assurance that God can remove it. It shows also that the writer knew that there were vast treasures in the word which he had not yet fully seen, marvels which he had not yet beheld, and mysteries which he had scarcely believed. The Scriptures teem with marvels; the Bible is wonder-land; it not only relates miracles, but it is itself a world of wonders. Yet what are these to closed eyes? And what man can open his own eyes, since he is born blind? God himself must reveal revelation to each heart. Scripture needs opening, but not one half so much as our eyes do; the veil is not on the book, but on our hearts. What perfect precepts, what precious promises, what priceless privileges are neglected by us, because we wander among them like blind men among the beauties of nature, and they are to us as a landscape shrouded in darkness!

The Psalmist had a measure of spiritual perception, or he would never have known that there were wondrous things to be seen, nor would he have prayed, ***“Open thou mine eyes;”*** but what he had seen made him long for a clearer and wider sight. This longing proved the genuineness of what he possessed, for it is a test mark of the true knowledge of God that it causes its possessor to thirst for deeper knowledge.

David’s prayer in this verse is a good sequel to verse 10, which corresponds to it in position in its octave: there he said, “O let me not wander;” and who so apt to wander as a blind man? And there, too, he declared, “With my whole heart have I sought thee;” and hence the desire to see the object of his search. Very singular are the interlacings of the boughs of the huge tree of this psalm, which has many wonders even within itself if we have opened eyes to mark them.

19. *“I am a stranger in the earth: hide not thy commandments from me.”*

“I am a stranger in the earth.” This is meant for a plea. By divine command men are bound to be kind to strangers, and what God commands in others he will exemplify in himself. The Psalmist was a stranger for God’s sake, else had he been as much at home as worldlings are: he was not a stranger to God, but a stranger to the world, a banished man so long as he was out of heaven. Therefore he pleads,

“Hide not thy commandments from me.” If these are gone, what have I else? Since nothing around me is mine, what can I do if I lose thy word? Since none around me know or care to know the way to thyself, what shall I do if I fail to see thy commands, by which alone I can guide my steps to the land where thou dwellest? David implies that God’s commands were his solace in his exile: they reminded him of home, and they showed him the way thither, and therefore he begged that they might never be hidden from him, by his being unable either to understand them or to obey them. If spiritual light be withdrawn, the command is hidden, and this a gracious heart greatly deprecates. What would be the use of opened eyes if the best object of sight were hidden from their view? While we wander here we can endure all the ills of this foreign land with

patience, if the word of God is applied to our hearts by the Spirit of God; but if the heavenly things which make for our peace were hid from our eyes, we should be in an evil case — in fact, we should be at sea without a compass, in a desert without a guide, in an enemy's country without a friend.

This prayer is a supplement to *“Open thou mine eyes,”* and as the one prays to see, the other deprecates the negative of seeing, namely the command being hidden, and so out of sight. We do well to look at both sides of the blessing we are seeking, and to plead for it from every point of view. The prayers are appropriate to the characters mentioned: as he is a servant, he asks for opened eyes that his eyes may ever be towards his Lord, as the eyes of a servant should be; as a stranger, he begs that he may not be strange to the way in which he is to walk towards his home. In each case his entire dependence is upon God alone.

Note how the third of the second octave (11) has the same keyword as this third of the third octave: *“Thy word have I hid,”* *“Hide not thy commandments from me.”* This invites a meditation upon the different senses of hiding *in* and *hiding from*.

20. *“My soul breaketh for the longing that it hath unto thy judgments at all times.”*

True godliness lies very much in desires. As we are not what we shall be, so also we are not what we would be. The desires of gracious men after holiness are intense; or they cause a wear of heart, a straining of the mind, till it feels ready to snap with the heavenly pull. A high value of the Lord's commandment leads to a pressing desire to know and to do it, and this so weighs upon the soul that it is ready to break in pieces under the crush of its own longings. What a blessing it is when all our desires are after the things of God! We may well long for such longings.

God's judgments are his decisions upon points which else had been in dispute. Every precept is a judgment of the highest court upon a point of action, an infallible and immutable decision upon a moral or spiritual question. The word of God is a code of justice from which there is no appeal.

“This is the Judge which ends the strife

***Where wit and reason fail;
Our guide through devious paths of life,
Our shield when doubts assail.”***

David had such reverence for the Word, and such a desire to know it, and to be conformed to it, that his longings caused him a sort of heartbreak, which he here pleads before God. Longing is the soul of praying, and when the soul longs till it breaks; it cannot be long before the blessing will be granted. The most intimate communion between the soul and its God is carried on by the process described in the text. God reveals his will, and our heart longs to be conformed thereto. God judges and our heart rejoices in the verdict. This is fellowship of heart most real and thorough.

Note well that our desire after the mind of God should be constant; we should feel holy longings ***“at all times.”*** Desires which can be put off and on like our garments are at best but mere wishes, and possibly they are hardly true enough to be called by that name, — they are temporary emotions born of excitement, and doomed to die when the heat which created them has cooled down. He who always longs to know and do the right is the truly right man. His judgment is sound, for he loves all God’s judgments, and follows them with constancy. His times shall be good, since he longs to be good and to do good at all times.

Remark how this fourth of the third eight chimes with the fourth of the fourth eight. “My soul breaketh;” “My soul melteth.” There is surely some recondite poetic art about all this, and it is well for us to be careful in studying what the Psalmist was so careful in composing.

21. “Thou hast rebuked the proud that are cursed, which do err from thy commandments.”

“Thou hast rebuked the proud that are cursed.” This is one of God’s judgments: he is sure to deal out a terrible portion to men of lofty looks. God rebuked Pharaoh with sore plagues, and at the Red Sea “the foundations of the world were discovered at thy rebuke, O Lord.” In the person of the haughty Egyptian he taught all the proud that he will certainly abase them. Proud men are cursed men: nobody blesses them, and they soon become a burden to

themselves. In itself, pride is a plague and torment. Even if no curse came from the law of God, there seems to be a law of nature that proud men should be unhappy men. This led David to abhor pride; he dreaded the rebuke of God and the curse of the law. The proud sinners of his day were his enemies, and he felt happy that God was in the quarrel as well as he.

“Which do err from thy commandments.” Only humble hearts are obedient, for they alone will yield to rule and government. Proud men’s looks are high, too high to mark their own feet and keep the Lord’s way. Pride lies at the root of all sin: if men were not arrogant they would not be disobedient. God rebukes pride even when the multitudes pay homage to it, for he sees it in rebellion against his own majesty, and the seeds of yet further rebellions. It is the sum of sin. Men talk of an honest pride; but if they were candid they would see that it is of all sins the least honest, and the least becoming in a creature, and especially in a fallen creature: yet so little do proud men know their own lame condition under the curse of God, that they set up to censure the godly, and express contempt for them, as may be seen in the next verse. They are themselves contemptible, and yet they are contemptuous towards their betters. We may well love the judgments of God, when we see them so decisively levelled against the haughty upstarts who would fain lord it over righteous men; and we may well be of good comfort under the rebukes of the ungodly, since their power to hurt us is destroyed by the Lord himself. “The Lord rebuke thee” is answer enough for all the accusations of men or devils.

In the fifth of the former octave the Psalmist wrote, “I have declared all the judgments of thy mouth,” and here he continues in the same strain, giving a particular instance of the Lord’s judgments against haughty rebels. In the next two portions the fifth verses deal with lying and vanity, and pride is one of the most common form, of those evils.

22. *“Remove from me reproach and contempt; for I have kept thy testimonies?”*

“Remove from me reproach and contempt.” These are painful things to tender minds. David could bear them for righteousness sake, but they were a heavy yoke, and he longed to be free from

them. To be slandered, and then to be despised in consequence of the vile accusation, is a grievous affliction. No one likes to be traduced, or even to be despised. He who says, "I care nothing for my reputation," is not a wise man; for in Solomon's esteem "a good name is better than precious ointment." The best way to deal with slander is to pray about it: God will either remove it or remove the sting from it. Our own attempts at clearing ourselves are usually failures: we are like the boy who wished to remove the blot from his copy, and by his bungling made it ten times worse. When we suffer from a libel it is better to pray about it than go to law over it, or even to demand an apology from the inventor. O ye who are reproached, take your matters before the highest court, and leave them with the Judge of all the earth. God will rebuke your proud accuser; be ye quiet, and let your advocate plead your cause.

"For I have kept thy testimonies." Innocence may justly ask to be cleared from reproach. If there be truth in the charges alleged against us, what can we urge with God? If, however, we are wrongfully accused, our appeal has a *locus standi* in the court and cannot be refused. If through fear of reproach we forsake the divine testimony we shall deserve the coward's doom; our safety lies in sticking close to the true and to the right. God will keep those who keep his testimonies. A good conscience is the best security for a good name; reproach will not abide with those who abide with Christ, neither will contempt remain upon those who remain faithful to the ways of the Lord.

This verse stands as a parallel both in sense and position to verse 6, and it: has the catchword of "**testimonies,**" by which it chimes with verse 14.

23. "Princes also did sit and speak against me: but thy servant did meditate in thy statutes?"

"Princes also did sit and speak against me" David was high game, and the great ones of the earth went a-hawking after him. Princes saw in him a greatness which they envied, and therefore they abused him. On their thrones they might have found something better to consider and speak about, but they turned the seat of judgment into the seat of the scorner. Most men covet a prince's good word, and to be spoken ill of by a great man is a great

discouragement to them; but the Psalmist bore his trial with holy calmness. Many of the lordly ones were his enemies, and made it their business to speak ill of him, they held sittings for scandal, sessions for slander, parliaments of falsehood, and yet he survived all their attempts upon him.

“But thy servant did meditate in thy statutes.” This was brave indeed. He was God’s servant, and therefore he attended to his Master’s business; he was God’s servant, and therefore felt sure that the Lord would defend him. He gave no heed to his princely slanderers; he did not even allow his thoughts to be disturbed by a knowledge of their plotting in conclave. Who were these malignance that they should rob God of his servant’s attention, or deprive the Lord’s chosen of a moment’s devout communion? The rabble of princes were not worth five minutes thought, if those five minutes had to be taken from holy meditation. It is very beautiful to see the two sittings: the princes sitting to reproach David, and David sitting with his God and his Bible, answering his traducers by never answering them at all. Those who feed upon the word grow strong and peaceful, and are by God’s grace hidden from the strife of tongues.

Note that in the close of the former octave he had said, ***“I will meditate;”*** and here he shows how he had redeemed his promise, even under great provocation to forget it. It is a praiseworthy thing when the resolve of our happy hours is duly carried out in our seasons of affliction.

24. “Thy testimonies also are my delight and my counsellors.”

They were not only themes for meditation, but ***“also”*** sources of delight and means of guidance. While his enemies took counsel with each other, the holy man took counsel with the testimonies of God. The fowlers could not drive the bird from its nest with all their noise. It was *their* delight to slander and *his* delight to meditate. The words of the Lord serve us for many purposes; in our sorrows they are our delight, and in our difficulties they are our guide; we derive joy from them and discover wisdom in them. If we desire to find comfort in the Scriptures we must submit ourselves; to their counsel, and when we follow their counsel it must not be with reluctance, but with delight This is the safest way of dealing with

those who plot for our ruin; let us give more heed to the true testimonies of the Lord than to the false witness of our foes. The best answer to accusing princes is the word of the justifying King.

In verse 16 David said, *“I will delight in thy statutes,”* and here he says, *“They are my delight:”* thus resolutions formed in God’s strength come to fruit, and spiritual desires ripen into actual attainments. Oh that it might be so with all the readers of these lines!

Exposition of verses 25 to 32, Daleth

25. My soul cleaveth unto the dust: quicken thou me according, to thy word.

26. I have declared my ways, and thou heardest me; teach me thy statutes.

27. Make me to understand the way of thy precepts: so shall I talk of thy wondrous works.

28. My soul melteth for heaviness: strengthen thou me according unto thy word.

29. Remove from me the way of lying: and grant me thy law graciously.

30. I have chosen the way of truth: thy judgments have I laid before me.

31. I have stuck unto thy testimonies: O Lord, put me not to shame.

32. I will run the way of thy commandments, when thou shalt enlarge my heart.

Here, it seems to me, we have the Psalmist in trouble bewailing the bondage to earthly things in which he finds his mind to be held. His soul cleaves to the dust, melts for heaviness, and cries for enlargement from its spiritual prison. In these verses we shall see the influence of the divine word upon a heart which laments its downward tendencies, and is filled with mourning because of its deadening surroundings. The word of the Lord evidently arouses prayer (25-29), confirms choice (30), and inspires renewed resolve (32): it is in all tribulation, whether of body or mind, the surest source of help.

This portion has D for its alphabetical letter: it sings of

Depression, in the spirit of Devotion, Determination, and Dependence

25 “*My soul cleaveth unto the dust: quicken thou me according to thy word.*”

“***My soul cleaveth unto the dust.***” He means in part that he was full of sorrow; for mourners in the east cast dust on their heads, and sat in ashes, and the Psalmist felt as if these ensigns of woe were glued to him, and his very soul was made to cleave to them because of his powerlessness to rise above his grief. Does he not also mean that he felt ready to die? Did he not feel his life absorbed and fast held by the grave’s mould, half choked by the death-dust? It may not be straining the language if we conceive that he also felt and bemoaned his earthly-mindedness and spiritual deadness. There was a tendency in his soul to cling to earth which he greatly bewailed. Whatever was the cause of his complaint, it was no surface evil, but an affair of his inmost spirit; his *soul* cleaved to the dust; and it was not a casual and accidental falling into the dust, but a continuous and powerful tendency, or *cleaving* to the earth. But what a mercy that the good man could feel and deplore whatever there was of evil in the cleaving! The serpent’s seed can find their meat in the dust, but never shall the seed of the woman be thus degraded. Many are of the earth earthy, and never lament it; only the heaven-born and heaven-soaring spirit pines at the thought of being fastened to this world, and bird-limed by its sorrows or its pleasures.

“***Quicken thou me according to thy word.***” More life is the cure for all our ailments. Only the Lord can give it. He can bestow it, bestow it at once, and do it according to his word, without departing from the usual course of his grace, as we see it mapped out in the Scriptures. It is well to know what to pray for, — David seeks quickening: one would have thought that he would have asked for comfort or upraising; but he knew that these would come out of increased life, and therefore he sought that blessing which is the root of the rest. When a person is depressed in spirit, weak, and bent towards the ground, the main thing is to increase his stamina and put more life into him; then his spirit revives, and his body becomes erect. In reviving the life, the whole man is renewed. Shaking off the dust is a little thing by itself; but when it follows upon

quicken, it is a blessing of the greatest value; just as good spirits, which flow from established health, are among the choicest of our mercies. The phrase, **“according to thy word,”** means — according to thy revealed way of quickening thy saints. The word of God shows us that he who first made us must keep us alive; and it tells us of the Spirit of God who through the ordinances pours fresh life into our souls: we beg the Lord to act towards us in this his own regular method of grace. Perhaps David remembered the word of the Lord in Deuteronomy 32:39, where Jehovah claims both to kill and to make alive, and he beseeches the Lord to exercise that life-giving power upon his almost expiring servant. Certainly, the man of God had not so many rich promises to rest upon as we have; but even a single word was enough for him, and he right earnestly urges “according to thy word.” It is a grand thing to see a believer in the dust and yet pleading the promise, a man at the grave’s mouth crying, “quicken me,” and hoping that it shall be done.

Note how this first verse of the 4th octonary tallies with the first of the third (17), — “That I may live”.... “Quicken me.” While in a happy state he begs for bountiful dealing, and when in a forlorn condition he prays for quickening. Life is in both cases the object of pursuit: that he may have life, and have it more abundantly. Truly this is wisdom. Fools hunger for more, and yet lose life; but the wise man knows that the life is more than meat. To pine for riches and neglect the soul is the common sin of unbelievers; and to seek true riches in an increase of life is the prudent course of the believer. Life, eternal life, this is true treasure. Our Lord has come not only that we may have life, but that we may have it more abundantly. Lord, evermore pour thy life-floods into us, that we may be quickened to the fullness of our manhood, and filled with all the fullness of God.

26. “I have declared my ways, and thou heardest me: teach me thy statutes.”

“I have declared my ways.” Open confession is good for the soul. Nothing brings more ease and more life to a man than a frank acknowledgment of the evil which has caused the sorrow and the lethargy. Such a declaration proves that the man knows his own condition, and is no longer blinded by pride. Our confessions are

not meant: to make God know our sins, but to make us know them.

“And thou heardest me.” His confession had been accepted; it was not lost labour; God had drawn near to him in it. We ought never to go from a duty till we have been accepted in it. Pardon follows upon penitent confession, and David felt that he had obtained it. It is God’s way to forgive our sinful way when we from our hearts confess the wrong.

“Teach me thy statutes.” Being truly sorry for his fault, and having obtained full forgiveness, he is anxious to avoid offending again, and hence he begs to be taught obedience. He was not willing to sin through ignorance; he wished to know all the mind of God by being taught it by the best of teachers. He pined after holiness. Justified men always long to be sanctified. When God forgives our sins we are all the more fearful of sinning again. Mercy, which pardons transgression, sets us longing for grace which prevents transgression. We may boldly ask for more when God has given us much; he who has washed out the past stain will not refuse that which will preserve us from present and future defilement. This cry for teaching is frequent in the Psalm; in verse 12 it followed a sight of God, here it follows from a sight of self. Every experience should lead us thus to plead with God.

27. “Make me to understand the way of thy precepts: so shall I talk of thy wondrous works.”

“Make me to understand the way of thy precepts.” Give me a deep insight into the practical meaning of thy word; let me get a clear idea of the tone and tenor of thy law. Blind obedience has but small beauty; God would have us follow him with our eyes open. To obey the letter of the word is all that the ignorant can hope for: if we wish to keep God’s precepts in their spirit we must come to an understanding of them, and that can be gained nowhere but at the Lord’s hands. Our understanding needs enlightenment and direction: he who made our understanding must also make us understand. The last sentence was, ***“teach me, thy statutes,”*** and the words, ***“make me to understand,”*** are an instructive enlargement and exposition of that sentence: we need to be so taught that we understand what we learn. It is to be noted that the Psalmist is not anxious to understand the prophecies, but the precepts, and he is not

concerned about the subtleties of the law, but the commonplaces and every-day rules of it, which are described as “*the way of thy precepts.*”

“*So shall I talk of thy wondrous works.*” It is in talking of what we do not understand. We must be taught of God till we understand, and then we may hope to communicate our knowledge to others with a hope of profiting them. Talk without intelligence is mere talk, and idle talk; but the words of the instructed are as pearls which adorn the ears of them that hear. When our heart has been opened to understand, our lips should be opened to impart knowledge; and we may hope to be taught ourselves when we feel in our hearts a willingness to teach the way of the Lord to those among whom we dwell.

“*Thy wondrous works.*” Remark that the clearest understanding; does not cause us to cease from wondering at the *ways* and works of God. The fact is, that the more we know of God’s doings the more we admire them, and the more ready we are to speak upon them. Half the wonder in the world is born of ignorance, but holy wonder is the child of understanding. When a man understands the way of the divine precepts he never talks of his own works and as the tongue must have some theme to speak upon, he begins to extol the works of the all-perfect Lord.

Some in this place read “*meditate*” or “*muse*” instead of “*talk;*” it is singular that the words should be so near of kin, and yet it is right that they should be, for none but foolish people will talk without thinking. If we read the passage in this sense, we take it to mean that in proportion as David understood the word of God he would meditate upon it more and more. It is usually so; the thoughtless care not to know the inner meaning of the Scriptures, while those who know them best are the very men who strive after a greater familiarity with them, and therefore give themselves up to musing upon them.

Observe the third verse of the last eight (19), and see how the sense is akin to this. In that place he described himself as a stranger in the earth, and here he prays to know his way; there, too, he prayed that the word might not be hid from himself, and here he promises that: he will not hide it from others.

28. “My soul melteth for heaviness: strengthen thou me according unto thy word.”

“My soul melteth for heaviness.” He was dissolving away in tears. The solid strength of his constitution was turning to liquid, as if molten by the furnace-heat of his afflictions. Heaviness of soul is a killing thing, and when it abounds, it threatens to turn life into a long death, in which a man seems to drop away in a perpetual drip of grief. Tears are the distillation of the heart; when a man weeps he wastes away his soul. Some of us know what great heaviness means, for we have been brought under its power again and again, and often have we felt ourselves to be poured out like water, and near to being like water spilt upon the ground, never again to be gathered up. There is one good point in this downcast state, for it is better to be melted with grief than to be hardened by impenitence.

“Strengthen thou me, according unto thy word.” He had found out an ancient promise that the saints shall be strengthened, and here he pleads it. His hope in his state of depression lies not in himself, but in his God; if he may be strengthened from on high he will yet shake off his heaviness and rise to joy again. Observe how he pleads the promise of the word, and asks for nothing more than to be dealt with after the recorded manner of the Lord of mercy. Had not Hannah sung, “He shall give strength unto his King, and exalt the horn of his anointed” God strengthens us by infusing grace through his word: the word which creates can certainly sustain. Grace can enable us to bear the constant fret of an abiding sorrow, it can repair the decay caused by the perpetual tear-drip, and give to the believer the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness. Let us always resort to prayer in our desponding times, for it is the surest and shortest way out of the depths. In that prayer let us plead nothing but the word of God; for there is no plea like a promise, no argument like a word from our covenant God.

Note how David records his inner soul-life. In verse 20 he says, “My soul breaketh;” in verse 25, “My soul cleaveth unto the dust;” and here, “My soul melteth.” Further on, in verse 81, he cries, “My soul fainteth;” in 109, “My soul is continually in my hand;” in 167, “My soul hath kept thy testimonies;” and lastly, in 175, “Let my soul live.” Some people do not even know that they have a soul,

and here is David all soul. What a difference there is between the spiritually living and the spiritually dead!

29. ***“Remove from me the way of lying: and grant me: thy law graciously.”***

“Remove from me the way of lying.” This is the way of sin, error, idolatry, folly, self-righteousness, formalism, hypocrisy. David would not only be kept from that way, but have it kept from him; he cannot endure to have it near him, he would have it swept away from his sight, He desired to be right and upright, true and in the truth; but he feared that a measure of falsehood would cling to him unless the Lord took it away, and therefore he earnestly cried for its removal. False motives may at times sway us, and we may fall into mistaken notions of our own spiritual condition before God, which erroneous conceits may be kept up by a natural prejudice in our own favour, and so we may be confirmed in a delusion, and abide under error unless grace comes to the rescue. No true heart can rest in a false view of itself; it finds no anchorage, but is tossed to and fro till it gets into the truth and the truth into it. The true-born child of heaven sighs out and cries against a lie, desiring to have it taken away as much as a man desires to be set at a distance from a venomous serpent or a raging lion.

“And grant me thy law graciously.” He is in a gracious state who looks upon the law itself as a gift of grace. David wishes to have the law opened up to his understanding, engraved upon his heart, and carried out in his life; for this he seeks the Lord, and pleads for it as a gracious grant. No doubt he viewed this as the only mode of deliverance from the power of falsehood: if the law be not in our hearts the lie will enter. David would seem to have remembered those times when, according to the eastern fashion, he had practiced deceit for his own preservation, and he saw that he had been weak and erring on that point; therefore he was bowed down in spirit and begged to be quickened and delivered from transgressing in that manner any more. Holy men cannot review their sins without tears, nor weep over them without entreating to be saved from further offending.

There is an evident opposition between falsehood and the gracious power of God’s law. The only way to expel the lie is to

accept the truth. Grace also has a clear affinity to truth: no sooner do we meet with the sound of the word “*graciously*” than we hear the footfall of truth: “I have chosen the way of truth.” Grace and truth are ever linked together, and a belief of the doctrines of grace is a grand preservative from deadly error.

In the fifth verse of the preceding octave (21) David cries out against pride, and here against lying — these are much the same thing. Is not pride the greatest of all lies?

30. “*I have chosen the way of truth: thy judgments have I laid before me.*”

“*I have chosen the way of truth.*” As he abhorred the way of lying, so he chose the way of truth: a man must choose one or the other, for there cannot be any neutrality in the case. Men do not drop into the right way by chance; they must choose it, and continue to choose it, or they will soon wander from it. Those whom God has chosen in due time choose his way. There is a doctrinal way of truth which we ought to choose, rejecting every dogma of man’s devising; there is a ceremonial way of truth which we should follow, detesting all the forms which apostate churches have invented; and then there is a practical way of truth, the way of holiness, to which we must adhere, whatever may be our temptation to forsake it. Let our election be made and made irrevocably. Let us answer to all seducers, “I have chosen, and what I have chosen I have chosen.” O Lord, by thy grace lead us with a hearty free-will to choose to do thy will; thus shall thine eternal choice of us bring forth the end which it designs.

“*Thy judgments have I laid before me.*” What he had chosen he kept in mind, laying it out before his mind’s eye. Men do not become holy by a careless wish: there must be study, consideration, deliberation and earnest inquiry, or the way of truth will be missed. The commands of God must be set before us as the mark to aim at, the model to work by, and the road to walk in. If we put God’s judgments into the background we shall soon find ourselves going back from them.

Here again the sixth stanzas of the third and fourth octaves ring out a similar note. “I have kept thy testimonies” (22), and “Thy judgments have I laid before me.” This is a happy confession, and

there is no wonder that it is repeated.

31. “*I have stuck unto thy testimonies: O Lord, put me not to shame.*”

“*I have stuck unto thy testimonies,*” — or, I have cleaved; for the word is the same as in verse 25. Though cleaving to the dust of sorrow and of death, yet he kept fast hold of the divine word. This was his comfort, and his faith stuck to it, his love and his obedience held on to it, his heart and his mind abode in meditation upon it. His choice was so heartily and deliberately made that he stuck to it for life, and could not be removed from it by the reproaches of those who despised the way of the Lord. What could he have gained by quitting the sacred testimony? Say rather, what would he not have lost if he had ceased to cleave to the divine word? It is pleasant to look back upon past perseverance and to expect grace to continue equally steadfast in the future. He who has enabled us to stick to him will surely stick to us.

In these days, when so many make their boast of “advanced thought,” it may sound singular to speak of sticking to God’s testimonies; but whether singular or not, let us imitate the man of God. Perseverance in the truth when it is unfashionable is the test of a real believer. The faith of God’s elect wears constancy as its crown. Others may gad abroad after the novelties of human opinion; but the true-born child of God glories in saying to his heavenly Father — **“*I have stuck unto thy testimonies.*”**

“*O LORD, put me not to shame!*” This would happen if God’s promises were unfulfilled, and if the heart of God’s servant were suffered to fail. This we have no reason to fear, since the Lord is faithful to his word. But it might also happen through the believer’s acting in an inconsistent manner, as David had himself once done, when he fell into the way of lying, and pretended to be a madman. If we are not true to our profession we may be left to reap the fruit of our folly, and that will be the bitter thing called **“*shame.*”** It is evident from this that a believer ought never to be ashamed, but act the part of a brave man who has done nothing to be ashamed of in believing his God, and does not mean to adopt a craven tone in the presence of the Lord’s enemies. If we beseech the Lord not to put us to shame, surely we ought not ourselves to be ashamed in the

presence of the adversary.

The prayer of this verse is found in the parallel verse of the next section (39): “Turn away my reproach which I fear.” It is evidently a petition which was often on the Psalmist’s heart. A brave heart is more wounded by shame than by any weapon which a soldier’s hand can wield.

32. “I will run the way of thy commandments, when thou shalt enlarge my heart.”

“I will run the way of thy commandments.” With energy, promptitude, and zeal he would perform the will of God, but he needed more life and liberty from the hand of God.

“When thou shalt enlarge my heart,” Yes, the heart is the master; the feet soon run when the heart is free and energetic. Let the affections be aroused and eagerly set on divine things, and our actions will be full of force, swiftness and delight. God must work in us first, and then we shall will and do according to his good pleasure. He must change the heart, unite the heart, encourage the heart, strengthen the heart, and enlarge the heart, and then the course of the life will be gracious, sincere, happy and earnest; so that from our lowest up to our highest state in grace we must attribute all to the free favour of our God. We must run; for grace is not an overwhelming force which compels unwilling minds to move contrary to their will: our running is the spontaneous leaping forward of a mind which has been set free by the hand of God, and delights to show its freedom by its bounding speed. What a change from verse 25 to the present, from cleaving to the dust to running in the way! It is the excellence of holy sorrow that it works in us the quickening for which we seek, and then we show the sincerity of our grief and the reality of our revival by being zealous in the ways of the Lord.

For the third time an octave closes with, “I will.” These “I wills” of the Psalms are right worthy of being each one the subject of study and discourse.

Note how the heart has been spoken of up to this point: **“whole heart”** (2), **“uprightness of heart”** (7), **“hid in mine heart”** (2), **“enlarge my heart.”** There are many more allusions further on, and these all go to show what heart-work David’s religion was. It is one

of the great lacks of our age that heads count for more than hearts, and men are far more ready to learn than to love, though they are by no means eager in either direction.

Exposition of verses 33 to 40, He

33. Teach me, O LORD, the way of thy statutes; and I shall keep it unto the end.

34. Give me understanding, and I shall keep thy law; yea! Shall observe it with my whole heart.

35. Make me to go in the path of thy commandments; for therein do I delight.

36. Incline my heart unto thy testimonies, and not to covetousness.

37. Turn away mine eyes from beholding vanity; and quicken thou me in thy way.

38. Stablish thy word unto thy servant, who is devoted to thy fear.

39. Turn away my reproach which I fear: for thy judgments are good.

40. Behold, I have longed after thy precepts: quicken me in thy righteousness.

A sense of dependence and a consciousness of extreme need pervade this section, which is all made up of prayer and plea. The former eight verses trembled with a sense of sin, quivering with a childlike sense of weakness and folly, which caused the man of God to cry out for the help by which alone his soul could be preserved from falling back into sin. That cry for help is here expressed in requests for teaching, upholding, inclining, stablishing and quickening.

The section is a honeycomb of prayers. Let us put up similar petitions while we read, and we may be assured that prayers thus taught us by the Lord will be answered by him.

33. “Teach me O Lord, the way of thy statutes; and I shall keep it unto the end.”

“Teach me, O Lord, the way of thy statutes.” Childlike, blessed words, from the lips of an old, experienced believer, and he a king,

and a man inspired of God. Alas for those who will never be taught! They dote upon their own wisdom; but their folly is apparent to all who rightly judge. The Psalmist desires to have the Lord for his teacher; for he feels that his heart will not learn of any less effectual instructor. A sense of great slowness to learn drives us to seek a great teacher. What condescension it is on our great Jehovah's part that he deigns to teach those who seek him! The lesson which is desired is thoroughly practical; the holy man would not only learn the *statutes*, but the *way* of them, the daily use of them, their tenor, spirit, direction, habit, tendency. He would know that path of holiness which is hedged in by divine law, along which the commands of the Lord stand as sign-posts of direction, and mile-stones of information, guiding and marking our progress. The very desire to learn this way is in itself an assurance that we shall be taught therein; for he who made us long to learn will be sure to gratify the desire.

“And I shall keep it unto the end.” Those who are taught of God never forget their lessons. When divine grace sets a man in the true way, he will be true to it. Mere human wit and will have no such enduring influence: there is an end to all perfection of the flesh, but there is no end to heavenly grace except its own end, which is the perfecting of holiness in the fear of the Lord. Perseverance to the end is most certainly to be predicted of those whose, beginning is in God, and with God, and by God; but those who commence without the Lord's teaching soon forget what they learn, and start aside from the way upon which they professed to have entered. No one may boast that he will hold on his way in his own strength, for that must depend upon the continual teaching of the Lord: we shall fall like Peter, if we presume on our own firmness, as he did. If God keeps us we shall keep his way; and it is a great comfort to know that it is the way with God to keep the feet of his saints. Yet we are to watch as if our keeping of the way depended wholly on ourselves: for, according to this verse, our perseverance rests not on any force or compulsion, but on the teaching of the Lord, and assuredly teaching, whoever be the teacher, requires learning on the part of the taught one: no one can teach a man who refuses to learn. Earnestly, then, let us drink in divine instruction, that so we may

hold fast our integrity, and to life's latest hour follow on in the path of uprightness. If we receive the living and incorruptible seed of the word of God we must live: apart from this we have no life eternal, but only a name to live.

The "*end*" of which David speaks is the end of life, or the fullness of obedience. He trusted in grace to make him faithful to the utmost, never drawing a line and saying to obedience, "*Hitherto shalt thou come, but no further.*" The end of our keeping the law will come only when we cease to breathe; no good man will think of marking a date and saying, "It is enough, I may now relax my watch, and live after the manner of men." As Christ loves us to the end, so must we serve him to the end? The end of divine teaching is that we may persevere to the end.

The portions of eight show a relationship still. 'GIMEL' begins with prayer for life, that he may keep the word (17); 'DALETH' cries for more life, according to that word (25); and now 'HE' opens with a prayer for teaching, that the man of God may keep the way of God's statute. If a keen eye is turned upon these verses a closer affinity will be discerned.

34. "*Give me understanding, and I shall keep thy law; yea, I shall observe it with my whole heart.*"

"*Give me understanding, and I shall keep thy law.*" This is the same prayer enlarged; or rather it is a supplement which intensifies it. He not only needs teaching, but the power to learn: he requires not only to understand, but to obtain *an understanding*. How low has sin brought us; for we even lack the faculty to understand spiritual things, and are quite unable to know them till we are endowed with spiritual discernment! Will God in very deed give us understanding? This is a miracle of grace. It will, however, never be wrought upon us till we know our need of it; and we shall not even discover that need till God gives us a measure of understanding to perceive it. We are in a state of complicated ruin, from which nothing but manifold grace can deliver us. Those who feel their folly are by the example of the Psalmist encouraged to pray for understanding: let each man by faith cry, "**Give me understanding.**" Others have had it, why may it not come to me? It was a gift to them; will not the Lord also freely bestow it upon *me*?

We are not to seek this blessing that we may be famous for wisdom, but that we may be abundant in our love to the law of God. He who has understanding will learn; remember, treasure up, and obey the commandment of the Lord. The gospel gives us grace to keep the law; the free gift leads us to holy service; there is no way of reaching to holiness but by accepting the gift of God! If God gives, we keep; but we never keep the law in order to obtaining grace. The sure result of regeneration, or the bestowal of understanding, is a devout reverence for the law and a resolute keeping of it in the heart. The Spirit of God makes us to know the Lord and to understand somewhat of his love, wisdom, holiness, and majesty; and the result is, that we honour the law and yield our hearts to the obedience of the faith.

Matthew Henry wisely notes that “*an enlightened understanding is that which we are indebted to Christ for; for the Son of God is come, and hath given us an understanding*” (1 John 5:20). Any writer can give us something to understand, but only the Lord Jesus can give to us understanding itself.

“*Yea, I shall observe it with my whole heart.*” The understanding operates upon the affections; it convinces the heart of the beauty of the law, so that the soul loves it with all its powers; and then it reveals the majesty of the lawgiver, and the whole nature bows before his supreme will. An enlightened judgment heals the divisions of the heart, and bends the united affections to a strict and watchful observance of the one rule of life. He alone obeys God who can say, “My Lord, I would serve thee, and do it with all my heart;” and none can truly say this till they have received as a free grant the inward illumination of the Holy Ghost. To observe God’s law with all our heart at all times is a great grace, and few there be that find it; yet it is to be had if we will consent to be taught of the Lord.

Look backward and observe the parallel to this verse in verses 2 and 10, where the *whole heart* is spoken of in reference to seeking, and then look forward to the like parallel in verse 58 in pleading, for mercy; these are all second verses in their octagonaries. The frequent repetition of the phrase *whole heart* shows the importance of undivided love: the heart is never whole or holy till it is whole

and wholly united in the fear of the Lord. The heart is never one with God till it is one within itself, and it is never one with itself till it is at one with God.

35. “*Make me to go in the path of thy commandments; for therein do I delight.*”

“To will is present with me; but how to perform that which is good I find not.” Thou hast made me to love the way, now make me move in it. It is a plain path, which others are treading through thy grace; I see it and admire it; cause me to travel in it. This is the cry of a child that longs to walk, but is too feeble; of a pilgrim who is exhausted, yet pants to be on the march; of a lame man who pines to be able to run. It is a blessed thing to delight in holiness; and surely he who gave us this delight will work in us the yet higher joy of possessing and practicing it. Here is our only hope; for we shall not go in the narrow path till we are made to do so by the Maker’s own power. O thou, who didst once make me, I pray thee make me again: thou hast made me to know; now make me to go! Certainly I shall never be happy till I do, for my sole delight lies in walking according to thy bidding.

The Psalmist does not ask the Lord to do for him what he ought to do for himself: he wishes himself to **“go”** or tread in the path of the command. He asks not to be carried while he lies passive; but to be made **“to go.”** Grace does not treat us as stocks and stones, to be dragged by horses or engines, but as creatures endowed with life, reason, will, and active powers, who are willing and able to go of themselves if once made to do so. God worketh in us, but it is that we may both will and do according to his good pleasure. The holiness we seek after is not a forced compliance with command, but the indulgence of a whole-hearted passion for goodness, such as shall conform our life to the will of the Lord. Can the reader say, **“therein do I delight?”** Is practical godliness the very jewel of your soul, the coveted prize of your mind? If so, the outward path of life, however rough, will be clean, and lead the soul upward to delight ineffable. He who delights in the law should not doubt but what he will be enabled to run in its ways; for where the heart already finds its joy, the feet are sure to follow.

Note that the corresponding verse in the former eight (35) was,”

Make me to understand;” and here we have, “*Make me to go.*” Remark the order: first understanding, and then going; for a clear understanding is a great assistance towards practical action.

36. “*Incline my heart unto thy testimonies, and not to covetousness.*”

“*Incline my heart unto thy testimonies.*” Does not this prayer appear to be superfluous, since it is evident that the Psalmist’s heart was set upon obedience? We are sure that there is never a word to spare in Scripture. After asking for active virtue, it was meet that the man of God should beg that his heart might be in all that he did. What, would his goings be if his heart did not go? It may be that David felt a wandering desire, an inordinate leaning of his soul to worldly gain; possibly it even intruded into his most devout meditations, and at once he cried out for more grace. The only way to cure a wrong leaning is to have the soul bent in the opposite direction. Holiness of heart is the cure for covetousness. What a blessing it is that we may ask the Lord even for an inclination! Our wills are free; and yet, without violating their liberty, grace can incline us in the right direction. This can be done by enlightening the understanding as to the excellence of obedience, by strengthening our habits of virtue, by giving us an experience of the sweetness of piety, and by many other ways. If any one duty is irksome to us, it behoves us to offer this prayer with special reference thereto: we are to love all the Lord’s testimonies, and if we fail in any one point, we must pay double attention to it. The leaning of the heart is the way in which the life will lean: hence the force of the petition, “*Incline my heart.*” Happy shall we be when we feel habitually inclined to all that is good! This is not the way in which a carnal heart ever leans; all its inclinations are in opposition to the divine testimonies.

“*And not to covetousness.*” This is the inclination of nature, and grace must put a negative upon it. This vice is as injurious as it is common; it is as mean as it is miserable. It is idolatry, and so it dethrones God; it is selfishness, and so it is cruel to all in its power; it is sordid greed, and so it would sell the Lord himself for pieces of silver. It is a degrading, grovelling, hardening, deadening sin, which withers everything around it: that is lovely and Christ like. He who

is covetous is of the race of Judas, and will in all probability turn out to be himself a son of perdition. The crime of covetousness is common, but very few will confess it; for when a man heaps up gold in his heart, the dust of it blows into his eyes, and he cannot see his own fault. Our hearts must have some object of desire, and the only way to keep out worldly gain is to put in its place the testimonies of the Lord. If we are inclined or bent one way, we shall be turned *from* the other: the negative virtue is most surely attained by making sure of the positive grace which inevitably produces it.

During the last few octaves the fourth has been *the heart* verse: see 20, 28, and now 36. Indeed, in all the preceding fourths great heartiness is observable. This also marks the care with which this sacred song was composed.

37. “Turn away mine eyes from beholding vanity; and quicken thou me in thy way.”

“Turn away mine eyes from beholding vanity?” He had prayed about his heart, and one would have thought that the eyes would so surely have been influenced by the heart that there was no need to make them the objects of a special petition; but our author is resolved to make assurance doubly sure. If the eyes do not see, perhaps the heart may not desire: at any rate, one door of temptation is closed when we do not even look at the painted bauble. Sin first entered man’s mind by the eye, and it is still a favourite gate for the incoming of Satan’s allurements; hence the need of a double watch upon that portal. The prayer is not so much that the eyes may be shut *as “turned away;”* for we need to have them open, but directed to right objects. Perhaps we are now gazing upon folly, we need to have our eyes turned away; and if we are beholding heavenly things; we shall be wise to beg that our eyes may be kept away from vanity. Why should we look on vanity? For it melts away as a vapour. Why not look upon things eternal? Sin is vanity, unjust gain is vanity, self-conceit is vanity, and, indeed, all that is not of God comes under the same head. From all this we must turn away. It is a proof of the sense of weakness felt by the Psalmist and of his entire dependence upon God, that he even asks to have his eyes turned for him; he meant not to make himself passive, but he intended to set forth his own utter helplessness apart from the grace of God. For

fear he should forget himself and gaze with a lingering longing upon forbidden object, he entreats the Lord speedily to make him turn away his eyes, hurrying him off from so dangerous a parley with iniquity. If we are kept from looking on vanity we shall be preserved from loving iniquity.

“And quicken thou me in thy way.” Give me so much life that dead vanity may have no power over me. Enable me to travel so swiftly in the road to heaven that I may not stop long enough within sight of vanity to be fascinated thereby. The prayer indicates our greatest need, — more life in our obedience. It shows the preserving power of increased life to keep us from the evils which are around us, and it also tells us where that increase life must come from, namely, from the Lord alone. Vitality is the cure of vanity. When the heart is full of grace the eyes will be cleansed from impurity. On the other hand, if we would be full of life as to the things of God we must keep ourselves apart from sin and folly, or the eyes will soon captivate the mind, and, like Samson, who could slay his thousands, we may ourselves be overcome through the lusts which enter by the eye.

This verse is; parallel to verses 21 and 29 in the previous eight: “rebuke,” “remove,” **“turn away;”** or “proud,” “lying,” **“vanity.”**

38. “Stablish thy word unto thy servant, who is devoted to thy fear.”

“Stablish thy word unto thy servant.” Make me sure of thy sure word: make it sure to me, and make me sure of it. If we possess the spirit of service, and yet are troubled with sceptical thoughts, we cannot do better than pray to be, established in the truth. Times will arise when every doctrine and promise seems to be shaken, and our mind gets no rest: then we must appeal to God for establishment in the faith; for he would have all his servants to be well instructed and confirmed in his word. But we must mind that we are the Lord’s servants, for else we shall not long be sound in his truth. Practical holiness is a great help towards doctrinal certainty: if we are God’s servants he will confirm his word in our experience. “If any man will do his will, he shall know of the doctrine;” and so know it as to be fully assured of it. Atheism in the heart is a horrible plague to a God-fearing man, it brings more torment with it than can well be

described; and nothing but a visitation of grace can settle the soul after it has been violently assailed thereby. Vanity or falsehood is bad for the eyes, but it is even worse when it defiles the understanding and casts a doubt upon the word of the living God.

“Who is devoted to thy fear,” or simply — **“to thy fear.”** That is, make good thy word to godly fear wherever it exists; strengthen the whole body of reverent men. Stablish thy word, not only to me, but to all the godly ones under the sun. Or, again, it may mean — **“Stablish thy word to thy fear,”** namely, that men may be led to fear thee; since a sure faith in the divine promise is the fountain and foundation of godly fear. Men will never worship a God in whom they do not believe. More faith will lead to more godly fear. We cannot look for the fulfilment of promises in our experience unless we live under the influence of the fear of the Lord: establishment in grace is the result of holy watchfulness and prayerful energy. We shall never be rooted and grounded in our belief unless we daily practice what we profess to believe. Full assurance is the reward of obedience. Answers to prayer are given to those whose hearts answer to the Lord’s command. If we are devoted to God’s fear we shall be delivered from all other fear. He has no fear as to the truth of the word who is filled with fear of the Author of the word. Scepticism is both the parent and the child of impiety; but strong faith both begets piety and is begotten of it.

We commend this whole verse to any devout man whose tendency is to scepticism: it will be an admirable prayer for use in seasons of unusually strong misgivings.

There is here an argumentative prayer. As good Bishop Cowper says, — “He who has received of the Lord grace to fear him, may be bold to seek any necessary good thing from him; because the fear of God hath annexed to it the promise of all other blessings.”

39. “Turn away my reproach which I fear: for thy judgments are good.”

“Turn away my reproach which I fear.” He feared just reproach, trembling lest he should cause the enemy to blaspheme through any glaring inconsistency. We ought to fear this, and watch that we may avoid it. Persecution in the form of calumny may also be prayed against, for it is a sore trial, perhaps the sorest of trials to men of

sensitive minds. Many would sooner bear burning at the stake than the trial of cruel mockings. David was quick tempered, and he probably had all the greater dread of slander because it raised his anger, and he could hardly tell what he might not do under great provocation. If God turns away our eyes from falsehood, we may also expect that he will turn away falsehood from injuring our good name. We shall be kept from lies if we keep from lies.

The judgments of the wicked are bad, and we may therefore appeal from them to the judgment of God. If, however, we have so acted as to come under the just censures of men, what cause we have to fear the just judgments of the Lord!

“For thy judgments are good.” Therefore he is anxious that none may speak evil of the ways of God through hearing an ill report about himself. We mourn when we are slandered; because the shame is cast rather upon our religion than ourselves. If men would be content to attribute evil *to us*, and go no further, we might bear it, for we are evil; but our sorrow is, that they cast a slur upon the word and character of God, who is so good, that there is none good in comparison, with him. When men rail at God’s government of the world, it is our duty and privilege to stand up for him, and openly to declare before him, **“Thy judgments are good;”** and we should do the same when they assail the Bible, the gospel, the law, or the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. But we must take heed that they can bring no truthful accusation against us, or our testimony will be so much wasted breath.

This prayer against reproach is a parallel to verse 31, and in general to many other of the seventh verses in the octaves, which usually imply opposition from without and a sacred satisfaction within. Observe the things which are good: **“thy judgments are good”** (39); “thou art good and doest good” (68); “good for me that I have been afflicted” (70); “teach me good judgment” (66).

40. “Behold, I have longed after thy precepts: quicken me in thy righteousness.”

“Behold, I have longed after thy precepts.” He can at least claim sincerity. He is deeply bowed down by a sense of his weakness and need of grace; but he does desire to be in all things conformed to the divine will. Where our longings are, there are we in the sight of

God. If we have not attained perfection, it is something to have hungered after it. He who has given us to desire, will also grant us to obtain. The precepts are grievous to the ungodly, and therefore when we are so changed as to long for them we have clear evidence of conversion, and we may safely conclude that he who has begun the good work will carry it on. Any man may long for the promises; but to long after the precepts is the mark of a renewed heart.

“Quicken me in thy righteousness.” The Psalmist had life enough to long for more life, in order that he might more perfectly know and observe the precepts of the Lord. Give me more life wherewith to follow thy righteous law; or give me more life because thou hast promised to hear prayer, and it is according to thy righteousness to keep thy word. How often does David plead for quickening but never once too often? We need quickening every hour of the day, for we are so sadly apt to become slow and languid in the ways of God. It is the Holy Spirit who can pour new life into us; let us not cease crying to him. The creation of life is a divine work, and so is the increase of it. Never let us forget to pray for quickening in each and every duty. Even the precepts seem a dead letter unless we feel life in our obedience to them. Nothing is worse in religion than spiritual death. The living God should be served with living worship.

The last verses of the octaves have generally exhibited an onward look of resolve, hope, and prayer. Here past fruits of grace are made the plea for further blessing. “Onward in the heavenly life!” is the cry of this verse. Oh for grace to press forward, and make daily advances towards heaven.

Keble thus versifies these eight verses: —

- 33. Lord, shower thy light along my ways
That I may keep thy laws entire,**
**34. Thy precepts teach me to obey,
And watch with all my heart’s desire.**
**35. By thine appointed rule and line,
Guide me, for there I love to be**
**36. My heart to thy decrees incline,
And not to gold’s base witchery.**
37. From sight of ill mine eyes withdraw,

*Give life and gladness in thy road,
 38. And on thy servant bind thy law,
 As best may teach thy fear, O God.
 39. Spare me the shame I deeply fear,
 Most merciful in judgment spare;
 40. Thou seest I hold thy counsels dear,
 Give life, thy righteousness to share*

Exposition of verses 41 to 48, Vau

- 41. Let thy mercies come also unto me, O Lord, even thy salvation, according to thy word.
 42. So shall I have wherewith to answer him that reproacheth me: for I, trust in thy word.
 43. And take not the word of truth utterly out of my mouth; for I have hoped in thy judgments.
 44. So shall I keep thy law continually for ever and ever.
 45. And I will walk at liberty for I seek thy precepts.
 46. I will speak of thy testimonies also before kings, and will not be ashamed.
 47. And I will delight myself in thy commandments, which I have loved.
 48. My hands also will I lift up unto thy commandments, which I have loved and I will meditate in thy statutes.*

In these verses holy fear is apparent and prominent. The man of God trembles lest in any way or degree the Lord should remove his favour from him. The eight verses are one continued pleading for the abiding of grace in his soul, and it is supported by such holy arguments as would only suggest themselves to a spirit burning with love to God.

41. “Let thy mercies come also unto me, O Lord, even thy salvation, according to thy word.”

“Let thy mercies come also unto me, O Lord.” He desired *mercy* as well as teaching, for he was guilty as well as ignorant. He needed much mercy and varied mercy; hence the request is in the plural. He needed mercies from God rather than from man and so he asks for *“thy mercies.”* The way of grace appeared to be

blocked, and therefore he begs that the mercies may have their way cleared by God, and may “*come*” to him. He who said, “Let there be light,” can also say, “Let there be mercy.” It may be that under a sense of unworthiness the writer feared lest mercy should be given to others, and not to himself; he therefore cries, “*Let them come unto me;*” “Bless me, even me also, O my Father.” The words are tantamount to our well-known verse: —

*“Lord, I hear of showers of blessing
Thou art scattering, full and free;
Showers, the thirsty land refreshing;
Let some droppings: fall on me,
Even me.”*

Lord, thine enemies come to me to reproach me, let thy mercies come to me to defend me; trials and troubles abound, and labours and sufferings not a few approach me; Lord, let thy mercies in great number enter by the same gate, and at the same hour; for art thou not “the God of my mercy?”

“*Even thy salvation.*” This is the sum and crown of all mercies — deliverance from all evil, both now and for ever. Here is the first mention of salvation in the psalm, and it is joined with mercy: “By grace are ye saved.” Salvation is styled “*thy salvation,*” thus ascribing it wholly to the Lord: “He that is our God is the God of salvation.” What a mass of mercies are heaped together in the one salvation of our Lord Jesus! It includes the mercy which spares us till our conversion, and leads to that conversion. We have calling mercy, regenerating mercy, converting mercy, justifying mercy, pardoning mercy. Nor can we exclude from complete salvation any of those many mercies which conduct the believer safely to glory. Salvation is an aggregate of mercies, incalculable in number, priceless in value, incessant in application, eternal in endurance. To the God of our mercies be glory, world without end.

“*According to thy word.*” The way of salvation is described in the word; salvation itself is promised in the word; and its inward manifestation is wrought by the word; so that in all respects the salvation which is in Christ Jesus is in accordance with God’s word. David loved the Scriptures, but he longed experimentally to know the salvation contained in them: he was not satisfied to read the

word; he longed to experience its inner sense. He valued the field of Scripture for the sake of the treasure which he had discovered in it. He was not contented with having chapter and verse, he wanted mercies and salvation.

Note that in the first verse of the section which bears the letter ‘HE’ (33) the Psalmist prayed to keep God’s word, and here in ‘VAU’ he begs the Lord to keep his word. In the first case he longed to come to the God of mercies, and here he would have the Lord’s mercies come to him: there he sought grace to persevere in faith, and here he seeks the end of his faith, even the salvation of his soul.

42. “*So shall I have wherewith to answer him that reproacheth me: for I trust in thy word.*”

“*So shall I have wherewith to answer him that reproacheth me.*” This is an unanswerable answer. When God, by granting us salvation, gives to our prayers an answer of peace, we are ready at once to answer the objections of the infidel, the quibbles of the sceptical, and the sneers of the contemptuous. It is most desirable that revilers should be answered, and hence we may expect the Lord to save his people, in order that a weapon may be put into their hands with which to rout his adversaries. When those who reproach *us* are also reproaching God, we may ask him to help us to silence them by sure proofs of his mercy and faithfulness.

“*For I trust in thy word.*” His faith was seen by his being trustful while under trial, and he pleads it as a reason why he should be helped to beat back reproaches by a happy experience. Faith is our argument when we seek mercies and salvation; faith in the Lord who has spoken to us in his word. **“*I trust in thy word*”** is a declaration more worth the making than any other; for he who can truly make it has received power to become a child of God, and so to be the heir of unnumbered mercies. God hath more respect to a man’s trust than to all else that is in him; for the Lord hath chosen faith to be the hand into which he will place his mercies and his salvation. If any reproach us for trusting in God, we reply to them with arguments the most conclusive when we show that God has kept his promises, heard our prayers, and supplied our needs. Even the most sceptical are forced to bow before the logic of facts.

In this second verse of this octave the Psalmist makes a confession of faith, and a declaration of his belief and experience. Note that he does the same in the corresponding verses of the sections which follow. See 50, "Thy word hath quickened me;" 58, "I intreated thy favour;" 66, "I have believed thy commandments;" 74, "I have hoped in thy word." A wise preacher might find in these a valuable series of experimental discourses.

43. "And take not the word of truth utterly out of my mouth; for I have hoped in thy judgments."

"And take not the word of truth utterly out of my mouth." Do not prevent my pleading for thee by leaving me without deliverance; for how could I continue to proclaim thy word if I found it fail me? Such would seem to be the run of the meaning. The word of truth cannot be a joy to our mouths unless we have an experience of it in our lives, and it may be wise for us to be silent if we cannot support our testimonies by the verdict of our consciousness. This prayer may also refer to other modes by which we may be disabled from speaking in the name of the Lord: as, for instance, by our falling into open sin, by our becoming depressed and despairing, by our labouring under sickness or mental aberration, by our finding no door of utterance, or meeting with no willing audience. He who has once preached the gospel from his heart is filled with horror at the idea of being put out of the ministry; he will crave to be allowed a little share in the holy testimony, and will reckon his dumb Sabbaths to be days of banishment and punishment.

"For I have hoped in thy judgments." He had expected God to appear and vindicate his cause, that so he might speak with confidence concerning his faithfulness. God is the author of our hopes, and we may most fittingly entreat him to fulfil them. The judgments of his providence are the outcome of his word; what he says in the Scriptures he actually performs in his government; we may therefore look for him to show himself strong on the behalf of his own threatenings and promises, and we shall not look in vain.

God's ministers are sometimes silenced through the sins of their people, and it becomes them to plead against such a judgment; better far that they should suffer sickness or poverty than that the

candle of the gospel should be put out among them, and that thus they should be left to perish without remedy. The Lord save us, who are his ministers, from being made the instruments of inflicting such a penalty. Let us exhibit a cheerful hopefulness in God, that we may plead it in prayer with him when he threatens to close our lips.

In the close of this verse there is a declaration of what the Psalmist had done in reference to the word of the Lord, and in this the thirds of the octaves are often alike. See 35, “therein do I delight;” 43, “I have hoped in thy judgments;” 51, “yet have I not declined from thy law;” 59, “I turned my feet unto thy testimonies;” and verses 67, 83, 99, etc. These verses would furnish an admirable series of meditations.

44. “*So shall I keep thy law continually for ever and ever.*”

Nothing more effectually binds a man to the way of the Lord than an experience of the truth of his word, embodied in the form of mercies and deliverances. Not only does the Lord’s faithfulness open our mouths against his adversaries, but it also knits our hearts to his fear, and makes our union with him more and more intense. Great mercies lead us to feel an inexpressible gratitude which, failing to utter itself in time, promises to engross eternity with praises. To a heart on flame with thankfulness, the “always, unto eternity and perpetuity” of the text will not seem to be redundant; yea, the hyperbole of Addison in his famous verse will only appear to be solid sense: —

***“Through all eternity to thee
A joyful song I’ll raise;
But oh! Eternity’s too short
To utter all thy praise.”***

God’s grace alone can enable us to keep his commandments without break and without end; eternal love must grant us eternal life, and out of this eternal life will come everlasting obedience. There is no other way to ensure our perseverance in holiness but by the word of truth abiding in us, as David prayed it might abide with him.

The verse begins with “*So,*” as did verse 42. When God grants his salvation, we are so favoured that we silence our worst enemy

and glorify our best friend. Mercy answereth all things. If God doth but give us salvation we can conquer hell and commune with heaven, answering reproaches, and keeping the law, and that to the end, world without end.

We may not overlook another sense which suggests itself here. David prayed that the word of truth might not be taken out of his mouth, and so would he keep God's law: that is to say, by public testimony as well as by personal life he would fulfil the divine will, and confirm the bonds which bound him to his Lord for ever. Undoubtedly the grace which enables us to bear witness with the mouth is a great help to ourselves as well as to others: we feel that the vows of the Lord are upon us, and that we cannot run back. Our ministry is useful to ourselves first, or it would not, in the next place, be useful to others. We must so preach and teach the word of God, that we thereby fulfil our life-work, and fulfil the law of love, constantly and consistently. It is a horrible thing when a man's preaching only increases his sin because he preaches otherwise than Scripture teaches.

45. *“And I will walk at liberty: for I seek thy precepts.”*

Saints find no bondage in sanctity. The Spirit of holiness is a free spirit; he sets men at liberty and enables them to resist every effort to bring them under subjection. The way of holiness is not a track for slaves, but the King's highway for freemen, who are joyfully journeying from the Egypt of bondage to the Canaan of rest. God's mercies and his salvation, by teaching us to love the precepts of the word, set us at a happy rest; and the more we seek after the perfection of our obedience, the more shall we enjoy complete emancipation from every form of spiritual slavery. David at one time of his life was in great bondage through having followed a crooked policy. He deceived Achish so persistently that he was driven to acts of ferocity to conceal it, and he must have felt very unhappy in his unnatural position as an ally of Philistines, and captain of the body-guard of their king. He must have feared lest through his falling into the crooked ways of falsehood the truth would no longer be on his tongue, and he therefore prayed God in some way to work his deliverance, and set him at liberty from such slavery. By terrible things in righteousness did the Lord answer him

at Ziklag: the snare was broken, and he escaped?

The verse is united to that which goes before; for it begins with the word **“And,”** which acts as a hook to attach it to the preceding verses. It mentions another of the benefits expected from the coming of mercies from God. The man of God had mentioned the silencing of his enemies (42), power to proceed in testimony (43), and perseverance in holiness; now he dwells upon liberty, which next to life is dearest to all brave men. He says, *“I shall walk,”* indicating his daily progress through life; **“at liberty,”** as one who is out of prison, unimpeded by adversaries, unencumbered by burdens, unshackled, allowed a wide range, and roaming without fear. Such liberty would be dangerous if a man were seeking himself or his own lusts; but when the one object sought after is the will of God, there can be no need to restrain the searcher. We need not circumscribe the man who can say, **“I seek thy precepts.”** Observe, in the preceding verse he said he would keep the law; but here he speaks of seeking it. Does he not mean that he will obey what he knows, and endeavour to know more? Is not this the way to the highest form of liberty — to be always labouring to know the mind of God, and to be conformed to it? Those who *keep* the law are sure to *seek* it, and bestir themselves to keep it more and more.

46. “I will speak of thy testimonies also before kings, and will not be ashamed.”

This is part of his liberty; he is free from fear of the greatest, proudest, and most tyrannical of men. David was called to stand before kings when he was an exile; and afterwards, when he was himself a monarch, he knew the tendency of men to sacrifice their religion to pomp and statecraft; but it was his resolve to do nothing of the kind. He would sanctify politics, and make cabinets know that the Lord alone is governor among the nations. As a king he would speak to kings concerning the King of kings. He says, **“I will speak:”** prudence might have suggested that his life and conduct would be enough, and that it would be better not to touch upon religion in the presence of royal personages who worshipped other gods, and claimed to be right in so doing. He had already most fittingly preceded this resolve by the declaration, “I will walk;” but he does not make his personal conduct, an excuse for sinful silence,

for he adds, ***“I will speak.”*** David claimed religious liberty, and took care to use it, for he spoke out what he believed, even when he was in the highest company. In what he said he took care to keep to God’s own word, for he says, ***“I will speak of thy testimonies.”*** No theme is like this, and there is no way of handling that theme like keeping close to the book, and using its thought and language. The great hindrance to our speaking upon holy topics in all companies is shame, but the Psalmist will ***“not be ashamed;”*** there is nothing to be ashamed of, and there is no excuse for being ashamed, and yet many are as quiet as the dead for fear some creature like themselves should be offended. When God gives grace, cowardice soon vanishes. He who speaks for God in God’s power, will not be ashamed when beginning to speak, nor while speaking, nor after speaking; for his theme is one which is fit for kings, needful to kings, and beneficial to kings. If kings object, we may well be ashamed of *them*, but never of our Master who sent us or of his message, or of his design in sending it.

47. “And I will delight myself in thy commandments, which I have loved.”

Next to liberty and courage comes delight. When we have done our duty, we find a great reward in it. If David had not spoken for his Master before kings, he would have been afraid to think of the law which he had neglected; but after speaking up for his Lord he felt a sweet serenity of heart when musing upon the word. Obey the command, and you will love it; carry the yoke, and it will be easy, and rest will come by it. After speaking of the law, the Psalmist was not wearied of his theme, but: he retired to meditate upon it he discoursed, and then he delighted; he preached, and then repaired to his study to renew his strength by feeding yet again upon the precious truth. Whether he delighted others or not when he was speaking, he never failed to delight himself when he was musing on the word of the Lord. He declares that he loved the Lord’s commands, and by his avowal he unveils the reason for his delight in them: where our love is, there is our delight. David did not delight in the courts of kings, for there he found places of temptation to shame, but in the Scriptures he found himself at home; his heart was in them, and they yielded him supreme

pleasure. No wonder that he spoke of keeping the law, which he loved. Jesus says, "If a man love me he will keep my words." No wonder that he spoke of walking at liberty and speaking boldly, for true love is ever free and fearless, Love is the fulfilling of the law; where love to the law of God reigns in the heart, the life must be full of blessedness. Lord, let thy mercies come to us, that we may love thy word and way, and find our whole delight therein.

The verse is in the future, and hence it sets forth, not only what David had done, but what he would do; he would in time to come delight in his Lord's commands. He knew that they would neither alter, nor fail to yield him joy. He knew also that grace would keep him in the same condition of heart towards the precepts of the Lord, so that he should throughout his whole life take a supreme delight in holiness. His heart was so fixed in love to God's will that he was sure that grace would always hold him under its delightful influence.

All the psalm is fragrant with love to the word, but here for the first time, love is expressly spoken of. It is here coupled with delight, and in verse 165 with "great peace." All the verses in which love declares itself in so many words are worthy of note. See verses 47, 97, 113, 119, 127, 140, 159, 163, 165, 167.

48. "My hands also will I lift up unto thy commandments, which I have loved; and I will meditate in thy statutes."

"My hands also will I lift up unto thy commandments, which I have, loved." He will stretch out towards perfection as far as he can, hoping to reach it one day. When his hands hang down he will cheer himself out of languor by the prospect of glorifying God by obedience; and he will give solemn sign of his hearty assent and consent to all that his God commands. The phrase "**lift up my hands**" is very full of meaning, and doubtless the sweet singer meant all that we can see in it, and a great deal more. Again he declares his love; for a true heart loves to express itself; it is a kind of fire which must send forth its flames. It was natural that he should reach out towards a law which he delighted in, even as a child holds out its hand to receive a gift which it longs for. When such a lovely object as holiness is set before us, we are bound to rise towards it with our whole nature, and till that is fully accomplished

we should at least lift up our hands in prayer towards it. Where holy hands and holy hearts go, the whole man will one day follow.

“And I will meditate in thy statutes.” He can never have enough of meditation. Loving subjects wish to be familiar with their sovereign’s statutes, lest they should offend through ignorance. Prayer with lifted hands and meditation with upward-glancing eyes will in happy union work out the best inward results. The prayer of verse 41 is already fulfilled in the man who is thus struggling upward and studying deeply. The whole of this verse is in the future, and may be viewed not: only as a determination of David’s mind, but as a result which he knew would follow from the Lord’s sending him his mercies and his salvation. When mercy comes down, our hands will be lifted up; when we enjoy the consciousness that God thinks upon us with special love, we are sure to think of him.

The second of six booklets.

