

The Pure Pursuit of Purity

Psalm 119:9-16

September 18, 2019

Psalm 119, go ahead and turn there in your Bibles. If you remember from last time as we were getting into Psalm 119, we've already done the *Aleph* stanza. Tonight, we're going to get into the *Beth* stanza. So the first eight verses we've covered. And hopefully, we'll cover verses 9 to 16 tonight.

And if you remember from last time, as we were kind of introducing Psalm 119, we said that these first two stanzas, the *Aleph* and the *Beth* stanzas, verses 1 to 16, they kind of form a prologue to the entirety of Psalm 119. So you kind of come through the gate of the verse, first 16 verses and everything, all the themes that are going to be in the rest of Psalm 119 are going to be there in the first. You've already got an exposure to those coming in through Psalm, verses 1 through 16.

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So last time in verses 1 to 8, we talked about the problem that the psalmist seeks to resolve. He kinda sites a or exposes a problem and then he wants to resolve it. Anybody remember what that what the psalmist problem is? Cause we all share the same problem. We can all identify with this concern. So anybody remember what it is? There is a standard and we don't meet it. There's a standard, and I would just add to that, there's a standard I long to attain it, but I don't meet it.

So that's the problem. The problem is not the standard. The problem is not God. The problem isn't his righteousness. The problem is himself, the fact that he longs to meet that standard and cannot. So he's finding the problem, the location of the problem within himself and saying, "Let me not wander from your commandments, you know, hold me fast. Don't utterly forsake me."

So, the psalmist has, if you look back at that first section just by way of review. He's identified the way to happiness is by the means of holiness, seeking the heart of God through the word of God, verses 1 to 3. "Blessed are those whose way is blameless, who walk in the law of the Lord! Blessed are those

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who keep his testimonies, who seek what? him so seek him with their whole heart, who also do not wrong, but walk in his ways!"

So the psalmist turns from the third person, "Blessed are they, those, those people out there," and then he goes to the second person address, speaking directly to God in verse 4. "You, you have commanded, you yourself have commanded that your precepts be kept diligently." In Hebrew, the Hebrew language, like the Greek language, the person, the subject, is contained in the verb. So there is, you don't see this in your Bibles, obviously, because you're not seeing the Hebrew there, but there is a, there is a Hebrew pronoun. So it's basically like "you yourself have commanded, you yourself."

So there's an explicit use of the pronoun meant to draw out an emphasis here on relationship. There's a relationship between the psalmist and the God that he is praying to, the God that he worships. "You yourself have commanded your precepts be kept diligently." So the psalmist, he wants to seek God blamelessly. He wants to walk in his law because he loves him. He wants to

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keep his testimonies. He wants to seek him wholeheartedly doing absolutely no wrong. That is his earnest desire.

But the problem is he finds himself so often distracted, veering off course, wandering. And that is the problem that the psalmist identifies. The desire for God, but a tendency to wander, to become distracted and turn away. Remember the Apostle Paul expressing something similar. Romans 7:14. Turn there real quick. Paul is here explaining a believer wrestling and struggling with internal sin.

It says in verse 14, "We know that the law is spiritual, but I am of the flesh." And again, you're gonna see in this the law, the standard, that's not the problem. That's not what he's identifying as the problem. You're gonna see that clearly here. "We know that the law is spiritual, but I am a m, of the flesh sold under the sin." There's the problem right there.

"For I do not understand my own actions Romans 7:15 . For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate. Now if I do what I do not want, I agree with the law, that it is good." So

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there's a harmony between what is good and what he wants. So, verse 17, "Now it's no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells in me. For I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is in my flesh. For I have the desire to what is right, but not the ability to carry it out. For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I keep on doing."

Anybody identify with that a little bit? "Now if I do what I do not want, it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells in me." So is he shirking personal responsibility here? No. He's taking personal responsibility, but he is seeing this sin principle within him. He says, verse 21, "I find there to a law", or a, or that word could be translated "a principle." "I find a principle here that when I want to do what's right, evil lies close at hand. For I delight in the law of God in my inner being."

So that really does spell out the problem. Christians, like the Apostle Paul, Christians are regenerate creatures. We've been born again by the Holy Spirit, according to John 3:3, John 3:5, Titus 3:5. And as a result of the new birth, we have a new

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nature. 2 Corinthians 5:17 says, "We are new creations in Christ." Ephesians 4:22 to 24 says, "We've been created new. We have put off this old man; we have put on a new man created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness."

So we are of a new birth. We have a new nature by that new birth and that new nature has new affections. So like Paul, we can truly say that we really do hate sin. A, verse 15, Every true believer hates sin, does not cherish sin. We don't want to do it. Like it says there, Romans 7, verse 20. Instead, we truly love God and his righteousness, verse 16, verse 18. We delight in his law in our inner being, verse 22. We truly want good, verse 19. And verse 21, we want to do what is right. That's the, the internal experience of every true believer.

And then in verse 23, we see another principle at work in us, the sin nature that troubles us. As Paul testifies, he said, "I see in my members another law or a principle waging war against the law of my mind." So I have this principle within me and it's waging war against what I truly want in my mind, in my heart, in

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my inner man, making me a captive to the law of sin that dwells in my members.

So same problem that the psalmist identifies. This is the same kind of theology that we find in Psalm 119. And we're gonna talk about that tonight. So go ahead and go back to Psalm 119 with that little bit of theological introduction. Tonight, we're gonna see what the psalmist proposes here is a method for solving that problem he identified in verses 1 to 8. This is a major theme throughout Psalm 119. So we'll begin by reading the section that we're gonna cover tonight, verses 9 to 16.

"How can a young man keep his way pure? By guarding it according to your word. With my whole heart I seek you; let me not wander from your commandments! I've stored up your word in my heart, that I might not sin against you. Blessed are you, O Lord; teach me your statutes! With my lips I declare all the rules of your mouth. In the way of your testimonies I delight as much as in all riches. I will meditate on your precepts and fix my eyes on your ways. I will delight in your statutes; I will not forget your word."

So that stanza there, the *Beth* stanza starts with a question, verse 9, "How can a young man keep his way pure?" So the how question there, it's more literally translated there, "With what," or "By what?" It's kind of asking by what means is a young man gonna keep his way pure. So it's really here about methodology. The methodology of holiness, the means by which one pursues holiness. So the second stanza of the prologue answers the problem that's raised in the first stanza, which we covered last week.

So verse 9, you could really see as the thesis statement of this *Beth* stanza, *Beth*, the Hebrew letter for what we call "B." Okay, so verse 9, it's really introducing the topic and it's in a manner that's typical of wisdom literature, kind of a question/answer format. So question: how can a young man keep his way pure? Answer: by guarding it according to your word. That's kind of that wisdom literature format.

Now let's start with this thesis statement. "How can a young man keep his way pure? By guarding it according to your word." Let

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me ask a question, whenever you see the joining together of, young man with pure way, and a concern about a young man and purity, what immediately comes to your mind. What do we assume that the psalmist is talking about when we think about young men and purity? Sexual purity seems to be the issue that immediately pops into everybody's mind whether male or female. Isn't that interesting?

There is a strong hormonal impulse in a young man's body that we all understand just by observation or having lived through it, that is not yet, due to maturity, due to age, not yet bridled and restrained by self-discipline and self-control. That's characteristic of young people. And leads them into the folly of sexual sin. So why young man? Why not young people? Or someone, anyone? Or young, middled aged and old? Or why young people in particular? Why not all people?

Here's what John Calvin says, talks about the, what he calls quote, "the carnal propensities being very powerful in youth requiring a double restraint." So John Calvin acknowledges just what we were saying. There are these carnal propensities and

they're powerful in youth. More powerful in young than in old,
K?

So we can see the passions of youth are probably hotter,
stronger, maybe more impulsive, less restrained, less guarded
than when you get older. That's just a natural fact of life. So
the psalmist aims this instruction here at the young with all
their attendant and powerful temptations, as well as the
inherent liability that the young have of being young, of being
inexperienced. In fact it, you read through the, the psalms and
the proverbs and they speak of the young in terms of being
simple. Simple, not being dumb, but being naïve, inexperienced.

So the simple needs wisdom, needs to learn and in order to gain
wisdom, there must be the fear of the Lord and there must be
restraint on the mind. There must be a guard so that you don't
let everything in, you're not openminded in the sense that you
just let everything in like a flood. But you're actually
discerning and discriminating on what you think about.

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So he aims this at the young, the inherent liability of being young, inexperienced, and the purpose, though, is in order to encourage and exhort all of us, no matter what age we are, Okay? So Calvin goes on to say, "We may reason from the greater to the less, for if the law of God possesses the power of restraining the impetuosity of youth, so as to preserve pure and upright all who take it for their guide, then assuredly when they come to maturity, and their irregular desires are considerably abated, it will prove the best antidote for correcting their vices."

So that's just a long way of saying if God's Word is powerful enough to bridle the young, how much more so will it be effective for taming the old? If the tendency toward sin, whether through strong hormonal impulse, or lack of wisdom, lack of restraint, lack of self-control, lack of discipline. If God's word is powerful enough to get a hold of a young man's mind and heart, well how much more when you get older and you just don't have the energy to fight it anymore? So you're just not able to stay in the fight so God's word maybe doesn't need to be as strong with you. But it is strong, cause it's always strong, right?

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So, as we said, the first thing that comes to mind when you put together, young man and purity, is you think about sexual purity. You think of it in context of sexual purity. I would say that's probably the case in any age, in any time, especially so in our pornified age, our heightened sense of sexual immorality here in our culture. But though the sexual purity is clearly addressed by this verse, that is not the only matter of purity that's in the psalmist's mind.

Notice how the psalmist asks here, opening up the first statement, "How can a young man keep his way pure?" It's not talking about just his way with women. It doesn't qualify it. It talks about his, way. It's actually a different word. We've talked about the word, way last time, the word *derek*. This is a different word from the word *derek*. The word for, the word *derek* refers to one's lifestyle or habit of living. That's what we talked about before.

This is the word *orah*. The literal word for a pathway or a stretch of road that's ahead of you. So it's not talking about lifestyle. It's talking about actually a stretch of road that

you have to walk ahead of you. So, your future, what's in front of you. Figuratively, it refers to the way ahead, the way forward, one's direction, one's path. This is about the behavior someone's gonna demonstrate in their life ahead of them.

So sexual purity is not the only purity that the psalmist is concerned about here. That's part of that, but it's just one subset of a larger, moral, ethical universe, moral, ethical behavior. This here is about an all encompassing moral purity, walking along a clean, pure, clear, moral and ethical pathway in life.

And I want to stop and camp on this for just a minute to talk about this issue of, whether it's sexual temptation or some other niggling sin, and think about it in terms of the need to pursue not just repentance in that one isolated issue, but to pursue what would be called a universal obedience, comprehensive obedience. I often find those that are struggling to repent of sexual sin, that they've become so fixated on that one issue that troubles them, that they neglect God's concern for repentance in every single area of their life.

They're so fixated on that one problem that they want to get over that they neglect a myriad of others issues that God also wants them to be pursuing obedience in. God wants the, as we're seeing here in the psalmist, God wants the whole heart. He doesn't just want the part of the heart that is seeking to gratify some lustful desire. We're to love the Lord our God with what? All of our what? Heart and soul and mind and strength. Right? Deuteronomy 6:5.

So God's desire for the whole of our soul demands a whole souled pursuit to repent in everything, to work out obedience in everything. Personally, I've found a lot of help in these matters by reading John Owen, *Two Treatises of the Mortification of Sin in Believers* is one of them. And another one of *Temptation: The Nature and Power of It*. And I often recommend those two works to other people.

Writing on the Christian's habit of mortification.

Mortification's just a big fancy word that talks about killing, killing sin, mortify it to make it dead. Okay, so someone who is

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going to mortify something is going to put it to death. So in context of theology, and especially with John Owen, mortification is referring to a believer's all out war on sin, killing it, terminating with extreme prejudice.

John Owen provides some really helpful counsel about wholehearted, whole souled repentance. And first he writes this, "Without sincerity and diligence in a universality of obedience, there is no mortification of any one perplexing lust to be obtained." Let me read that again, "Without sincerity and diligence in a universality of obedience," that is, you could say it in another way, "an all-encompassing commitment to obedience, there is no mortician of any one perplexing lust to be obtained."

And then Owen continues to describe what so many face, those who are subdued by a particular lust or a particular sin, that it is a powerful, strong, tumultuating, leads captive vexes," he's talking about the sin, right, the sin itself. "It vexes, disquiets, takes away peace. He's not able to bear it, wherefore he sets himself against it, prays against it, groans under it,

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sighs to be delivered. But in the meantime perhaps in other duties, in constant communion with God, in reading, prayer, meditation, in other ways that are not of the same kind with the lust wherewith he is trouble. He is loose and negligent. Let not that man think that ever he shall arrive to the mortification of the lust; he is perplexed with all."

I was listening to a recording, I believe a recording of Dr. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, who was counseling a, a woman who was struggling terribly with a sin. And she said, "Dr. Jones, I'm memorizing verses. I am praying about this night and day. I'm fasting. Every time I see that sin, I pray against it. Every time I do that, then I read verses on those issues and memorize and meditate on those things all the time."

And Dr. Lloyd-Jones said, "Just stop. You're, you're giving that sin way too much power and influence in your life and your thinking. Turn your attention to some other things." That was very wise pastoral counsel. But go back to that statement that John Owen just made. Pretty strong statement. He said, "Let not that man who is neglecting other duties, but wants to kill this

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one, let not that man think that ever he shall ever arrive to the mortification of the lust, that he is perplexed with all.”

Why is that? Why doesn't God deliver one who is that focused, that intent, that fastidious, that diligent in rooting himself of that perplexing, troubling sin? Doesn't God care for him? Here's what Owen said. He says, "This kind of endeavor for mortification," and he's talking about the endeavor of pursuing repentance or mortification of one particular issue. So think about what came to your mind when we said, young man and purity. Let's not do that anymore and John Owen is going to give the light of that.

He says, "This kind of endeavor for mortification proceeds from a corrupt principle, ground, and foundation, so that it will never proceed to a good issue. Hatred of sin as sin, not only as galling or disquieting, a sense of the love of Christ in the cross lie at the bottom of all true spiritual mortification. Now it is certain that that of which I speak proceeds from self-love." Think about that. You're trying to do a good thing, right? Killing a sin. But really if you don't do it from a

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general or a comprehensive concern for all righteousness, wholehearted obedience, then your mortification is a fleshly endeavor that proceeds from self-love.

Continuing with Owen, "Thou settest thyself with all diligence and earnestness to mortify such a lust or sin, what is the reason of it? It disquiets thee. It hath taken away thy peace. It fills thy heart with sorrow and trouble and fear. Thou hast no rest because of it. Yea, but friend, thou has neglected prayer or reading. Thou has been vain and loose in thy conversation and other things that have not been of the same nature with that lust wherewith thou art perplexed. These are no less sins and evils than those under which thou groanest. Jesus Christ bled for them, also.

"Why dost thou not set thyself against them also. If thou hatest sin as sin, every evil way thou wouldst be no less watchful against everything that grieves and disquiets an own soul. It's evident that thou contendest against sin merely because of thine own trouble by it. Would thy conscience be quiet under it? Thou wouldst let it alone. Did not disquiet

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thee, it should not be disquieted by thee. Now canst thou think that God will set in with such hypocritical endeavors that ever his spirit will bear witness to the treachery and falsehood of thy spirit.

“Dost thou think he will ease thee of that which perplexith thee, that thou mayest be as liberty to that which no less grieves him. No, says God. Here is one, if he could rid of this lust, I should never hear of him more. Let him wrestle with this, for he is lost. Let not any man think to do his own work that will not do God’s. God’s work consists in universal obedience. To be freed of the present perplexity is their own only.”

“Here is that of that of the Apostle, 2 Corinthians 7:1, ‘Cleanse yourselves from all pollution of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God.’ If we will do anything, we must do all things. So then it is not only an intense opposition to this or that peculiar lust, but a universal humble frame and temper of heart with watchfulness over every evil and for the performance of every duty that is accepted.” End quote.

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I've taken the time to explain all that and read that more extended quote from John Owen not only to help those who might be con, feeling overcome by a particular sin issue, but more immediately for our purposes to help you see that the concern of Psalm 19, verse 9, that thesis verse for this stanza is wider reaching and more deeply concerned about universal obedience. About our repentance from all sin. About obeying in whole of the way before us.

So the one who cares to pursue God only for some of his benefits is in the end gonna fail to find God or any of his benefits. That someone who pursues in a self-centered manner, and that's perhaps the chief sin of our evangelical moment, I believe. Verse 9 is not written by, to, or about those who pursue God for what they can get out of it. The entire Psalm is written about those and to those who care only to know God, to please him in obedience, and to do so by not sinning, but by living righteously and according to God's revealed Word. That's who this psalm is for. That's who wrote this psalm.

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So notice how verse 9, this whole thing assumes a goal that the continual pursuit of a morally pure lifestyle is what life is about. So when it says, "How can a young man keep his way pure," and when we think about our way being the road ahead of us, our future, what life is about, all our ambitions, all our hope, all our involvement in whatever is gonna be in the future. It's not about a job. It's not about place. It's not about situation, station in life. It's not about finances. It's not ambitions. It's not about climbing some ladder. It's not about stuff.

Moral purity before God. Pure holiness, that is the goal of life for someone who's in pursuit of knowing God. And we can be sure, as Jesus said, Matthew 6:33, that those "who seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, in addition, all these other things will be added to you, as well." So don't worry about your life, what you eat, what you drink, what you put on, all that stuff. Don't worry. Your heavenly Father knows you need that stuff. But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness.

So that's another reason why the psalmist here frames the question in terms of the purity of a young person's way. The

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verb that's translated there "to keep his way pure," is *zaka*, is the verb. It normally means to be clean or pure or clear. And here the verb is in its intensified form. This doesn't matter to any of you, but a *hithpael* stem, but it gives it a causative sense. So not just to be clean, but to make clean. Not just to be clear or pure, but to make or keep clean and pure.

So the answer to the opening question here is simple, concise, "How can a young man keep his way pure? By keeping it according to your word, by guarding it according to your word." The verb *samar*, same verb used back in verse 4, reminds us of God's revealed will. "You've commanded it, your precepts, to be kept diligently." So God's precepts, his commands, his word, this makes God's word both the standard of measurement, as well as the gracious means of attainment.

So it's the standard by which we're measured, but it's also the means by which we meet the standard. God's word is both law and grace. What's commanded by the righteous will of God and the grace of God to get us there. So the psalmist lays down a fundamental principle of sanctification, to perfectly keep one's

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path in line with God's word, that will guarantee moral purity. Moral, ethical purity will be the result of perfectly keeping your path in line with God's word.

Now, that is true. That's truly spoken. We all know, though, and live with the reality of another truth. And that's Proverbs 20, verse 9, which asks, "Who can say, 'I have made my heart pure; I am clean from my sin'?" It's rhetorical, right? The answer is no one. So the rest of the stanza and then according to George Zemek, the remaining 166 verses, they model both the dedication and dependency that's involved in making the answer of verse 9b progressively realized, experienced in life. We're gonna hear the unpacking of how to guard according to God's word in the rest of the stanza and the rest of Psalm 119.

So let's look at how the rest of the stanza unpacks and it's three things here, three body parts, you might say. How the psalmist has devoted his heart, his lips, and his eyes to the goal of pursuing purity. Heart, lips, and eyes. I'm gonna give you three foundational commitments here that'll inform your

pursuit of purity. First, commitment, number one, a seek God with a pure heart. Seek God with a pure heart.

This where the pursuit of purity begins in verses 10 and 11. You'll see this whole thing is coming in the context of prayer to God. He says in verse 10 and 11, "With my whole heart I seek you; let me not wander from your commandments! I've stored up your word in my heart, that I might not sin against you." Twice you can see there a reference to the heart, which is the fundamental issue in sanctification. That is the battleground in sanctification. You win the battle in the heart; you win the battle in the life.

First, though, the word, heart does raise for us Americans a needful point of clarity. Biblically speaking, what is meant by heart? We come into life and raised in this culture and breathe in and breathe out a view of the heart, which gets tugged pretty significantly by Hallmark every Valentine's Day, Rom Coms and all the rest, like what is the world is the heart? What's the biblical view?

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The Bible uses the word heart to refer to the life of the inner man. So if you just think of your inner self, all that makes you you on the inside, immaterial you, that's what the word heart biblically is. Now think, about this literally, about literal organ of the heart. And, and see how different this is from our American way of thinking about the heart being a feeling instrument only.

The heart is a literal organ that doesn't so much feel things as it conveys things. So the heart is the life center of the body pumping oxygenated nutrient rich blood to the body's organs. And then drawing the byproduct and waste stuff, that's my biological term, stuff, to be expelled from the body. So the heart is doing that. It's pumping and it's oxygenated blood, nutrient rich blood out to the organs to give the organs the food and the oxygen that they need to work. And then it's taken all the waste byproduct from all those other organs and it's pulling that back through. And it's putting it through filters and letting the body get rid of it. Okay.

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If the heart's not doing its job, the body is gonna be starved of oxygen and nutrients. It's gonna start filling up with toxic waste. And eventually, it's gonna die. That is why Proverbs 4:23 says, "Keep your heart with all vigilance, for from it flow the springs of life." So that's figurative, obviously. It's not talking about, you know, having a good heart doctor and being on good meds. It's talking about a figurative use of the word heart, to say keep it with all vigilance because the springs of life flow from that heart.

The biblical view of heart is more in line, actually, with modern science, than Hallmark is. It's not just a feeling instrument. In fact, it's not really that at all. In fact, when the Bible, biblical language, Hebrew, Greek, both refer to feeling, it more refers to what you have in the guts. And we actually feel that. When you feel troubled, you kind of feel it in the guts. When you feel excited, you kind of feel it here. You know? And so we understand that figuratively.

And the heart, then, is the command center of the soul. It's the seat of man's rational functions. So the heart, if you think

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about it, you're using your biblical heart. Okay. So if you think about it, it's, the heart is where we want, it's where we desire, it's where we plan, will, choose, decide things, which is why it symbolizes the focus of one's entire life. Man's religion, or his irreligion. His morality, his immorality. His ethics, or his unethical behavior. All of these things are matters of the heart.

So what the psalmist has done here is to take every impulse and affection and decision of his own heart and bind them all together with the same bridle and bit and then he drives his heart toward God. "With my whole heart I seek you." Now some of us think, and this is again back to that American view of the heart where we fall in love. No responsibility for it. I just couldn't help myself. I fell in love. And then we wonder why people fall out of love.

But we have this sense that our feelings, and our emotions, and everything, they just kind of go where they go. But the Bible tells us, no. No, you're responsible for where your heart goes. And you actually can control your thinking. You have the ability

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and the power, according to regenerate frame of mind, if you are born again, you have the ability not to go where your heart thinks it wants to go.

But to actually command your heart. Tell it what to do, tell it what to think, tell it what to desire. And that's really what the psalmist has done here. He's taken every impulse, affection, decision, desire of his heart, he's bound them all together with the same bridle. He jumps on that horse, and he commands that horse to go. He drives that heart toward God. "With my whole heart," verse 10, "I seek you."

That verb *daras* conveys an intense pursuing of something that's desired. So it's something longed for, it's deeply wanted, and, in this case, it is you, O God. It's you. "With my whole heart I seek you." Again, not after something, he's after someone. A person. He's in pursuit of God himself. And that's why what takes his prayer from a confession to something God knows, to a petition, "with my whole heart I seek you." And then that petition "so let me not wander from your commandments."

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Can you think of times you've prayed prayers like that? "Let me not wander from your commandments," but in all honesty your prayers are not quite whole-hearted. In other words, you want the larger principle, "let me not wander," as long as we don't have to deal with getting too specific about that. Like thinking about all the concrete issues involved in working out righteousness in the particulars and the concrete issues. As long as we don't need to get too detailed about all those pesky commandments.

So we pray about the bigger things, "O God, make me holy." But if making me holy means you can no longer do this, go there, have that friend, do this thing, that we're not so concerned about thinking too carefully about, right? Since we know that we all pray these "Let me not wander from your commandments," kind of prayers, in light of these two verses, verse 10 and 11, how can we see that the prayer of the psalmist is truly genuine and sincere?

It's because of what he confesses to God here in prayer in the next verse. He says, "I've store up your word in my heart that I

might not sin against you.” So what is he doing here? He’s confessing to God what only God can know. Namely two things, number one, his pattern of behavior, storing up God’s word, which is number two, driven by his internal motives, his intentions to what? Not sin. You talk about it in the general.

So to not sin. Period. Not just that particular sin, that pesky issue, that thing I don’t like the consequences of, that thing I’m embarrassed by, the thing. No. Everything. To not sin. So first he’s been storing up, treasuring God’s word in his heart. The idea for “word” here is interesting. It’s general, but it’s a word that can also convey the idea of a promise.

So there’s the word *debar*, which is “word” and that can refer like to the ten words, Ten Commandments. This is not that word. This is a different word for “word.” It’s one that can be conveyed as “promise.” So this first part here is a positive inducement to sanctification, to the pursuit of purity, to the heart of God himself. Because he treasures the words of promise that his God has made to him. So don’t miss the insistence of the psalmist that we see his pursuit of purity in terms of a

relationship here, in terms of knowing his God in the beauty of holiness.

You've made promises in your word about even the outcome. "I have stored these things up in my heart." I just keep piling them up. The word could be "stored" or "treasured." I'm treasuring these things. These are so precious to me. So it's a positive inducement to sanctification.

Second, his constant practice of storing up God's word in his heart, that habit is driven by, there, internal motives, his intention to not sin against God. He does not want to sin against the one he loves. It's like a husband and a wife. They don't want to sin against each other; they love each other. It's like your children. You don't want to sin against them; you love your children. How much more so here with God.

And the word here for sin *hata* is a broad word that means missing the mark. He's not simply concerned about doing some horrible, viable, reprehensible individual thing that would make even a criminal blush. He's talking about any violation of the perfect will of God as revealed. In order to illustrate this

word *hata*, they point to Judges 20, verse 16, to illustrate the meaning.

Judges 20:16 says, "Among all these gathered up for battle were 700 chosen men who were left-handed; everyone could sling a stone at a hair and not miss." Now I'm a pretty good shot. I'm a really good shot with a weapon. But I don't often do target practice with human hairs. I use something a little bit more substantial. That issue of not missing, that is this word *hata*, the verb there to not miss hitting the target of obedience to God's word, not even by a slender hair's breadth. That is the idea.

So why is there such an exacting concern here to fastidious obedience to God? Why so careful? Don't even want to miss the mark in just even a hair's breadth. And again the concern here is for the relationship, "that I might not sin against you." There's a commentator Will Soll says, "It must not be concluded here that the psalmist here was speaking merely of memorization. It's not just memorization since understanding and personal transformation, not knowledge and memory, are the issue here."

Now if you're gonna have understanding and personal transformation, what do you need? Knowledge and memory.

You know and memorize, you study and understand in order that you can understand God and you can be transformed, to become conformed to him. W. Graham Scroggie says the psalmist speaks of the, quote "best thing hidden in the best place for the best purposes." So you got the word, promise of God, that's the best thing, treasured within our hearts, that's in the best place, in order that we may never miss the mark in adhering to his revealed wisdom, so that's the best purpose.

In the middle of the psalmist's prayer, he is all-in, whole souled seeking, his word treasuring, sin abasing, confession to God, he prays that prayer, "Let me not wander from your commandments." Why does he pray that prayer? Didn't we just say that keeping our path perfectly in line with God's word would guarantee moral purity? So since the course is clear before us, why do we pray this, "Let me not wander."

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The psalmist's petition here, he betrays something we all know about our own hearts, we're "prone to wander, Lord, I feel it, prone to leave the God I love." And the psalmist's prayer anticipates him really succumbing to what's warned against in Proverbs 19:27, "Cease to hear instruction, my son, and you will stray from the words of knowledge." It is a guarantee. Cease to hear instruction, stop listening to the words, stop in your Bibles, don't be about the daily disciplines of Bible reading and prayer. It's not, you might have a bad day, you might lose your temper once in a while. No! You will stray from words of knowledge, guaranteed because of what we are fundamentally.

Same concern prompted Spurgeon to write this: "The man of God exerts himself but does not trust himself. His heart is in his walking with God, but he knows that even his whole strength is not enough to keep him right unless his king shall be his keeper. He who made the commands shall make him constant in obeying them." It reminds me of what Augustine said, "God command what you will but give what you command." Same kind of idea.

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So seek God, first point, seek God with a pure heart. Second foundational commitment in pursuing purity of life, number two, praise God with pure lips. Praise God with pure lips. We started with the heart, the driving engine of the moral life of man. And now we move to the organ that reveals the heart through speech: the lips and the mouth. Verses 12 to 13, "Blessed are you, O Lord; teach me your statutes! With my lips I declare all the rules of your mouth."

So the prayer here continues with an expression of praise, another petition, and then a commitment to praise. I like how Zemek summarizes this. He says, "This is about God, the gracious teacher; the psalmist, the dependent disciple; and the textbook, the sufficient word." And then Zemek talks about the intensified verb form here. He says, "The prayer, verse 11, certainly indicates great boldness but it all the more shows the psalmist's absolute dependence. The learner disciple is publishing I like his little pun here his declaration of dependance Not independence, but dependance in the presence of the source of all knowledge and wisdom."

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This is what we read here from Jesus, Matthew 4:4, "Man shall not live by bread alone, but by what? every word that comes from the mouth of God." So if you were to pass on this teaching to someone, which has, let's be clear, very much focused on obedience to God's word, what we do, even not missing the mark in one little iota, and they accuse you of being legalistic, how would you respond?

This is not an issue of legalism because this is a theology issue. This is a theological issue. We saw in the first stanza, it's the person of God who's at the center of that stanza. It's the emphatic, *you*, in verse 4, pronoun *ata* that's repeated in verse 12. Another emphatic *you* pronoun *ata*, plus the divine name Yahweh. "Blessed are you, O Lord."

Once again, we need to see that the pursuit of purity is not a moralistic issue. Really, the concern for purity is a concern for God, wanting him, wanting to please him, wanting to know him. So the pursuit of purity, we might say the pure pursuit of purity is a theological issue. It has a Theo-centric goal, that is to know and love and worship God. It's a pursuit that's

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grounded solely in and fixed whole heartedly upon a redeemed, living, vital relationship with the true and living God.

Notice here how private devotion turns into public praise in verse 13. So you got verse 12, "Blessed are you, O Lord; teach me your statutes!" He's the disciple and God's the discipler. He's the student; God's the teacher. There's this intimate devotional joyful relationship, private devotion here, but it turns into public praise. Verse 13, "With my lips I declare all the rules of your mouth." It could be, rehearse, recite. All these words, I'm gonna talk about 'em.

John Calvin writes, "In this verse he declares that the law of God was not only deeply engraven on his own heart, but that it was his earnest and strenuous endeavor to gain over many of his fellow disciples into subjection to God." End quote. Is that how you see yourself? As endeavoring strenuously and earnestly to win over many of your fellow disciples into quote, "subjection to God"?

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Is that how we evangelize? “Hey, nice to meet you. You’re not a Christian? Hey, I wondered if you’d like to join me in subjection to God? You want to have a blessed life? Bow your knees and submit to him. Join me.” I think we need to recover, not just the language, but the mentality in our churches today, don’t you? That we are trying to gain everybody around us into subjection to God. Why? Because it is a blessed state of being.

May God grant us the blessing of seeing an end to this squishy spined evangelicalism that just leaves everybody in a state of spiritual mediocrity. I’d like to see us Christians speaking more and more like Calvin speaks there. But notice the connection between the private and the public spheres of devotion to God. There is a reciprocating relationship between the two. And every genuine-hearted believer is attendant to both of these things.

And I’ll ask it this way, what, what would you call someone who praises God in public, but has no heart for him in private? Hypocrite. What’s the opposite error? How would you describe someone who praises God in private, who has great morning

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devotions over coffee, but never speaks of him to anybody else? A coward, disobedient. Cowardice is a issue of obedience and disobedience, isn't it? When God says, Go speak, and you say, I'm too scared, what are you? Disobeying him. Doesn't really matter what the reason is.

So you bring it into an issue of obedience and disobedience, what does that mean about your devotion to God? It means that you claim to love God, but you don't do what he says. I don't care how fulfilling your devotions were if you're not actually doing and obeying and pursuing obedience to what he said, that's a very thin claim, isn't it?

If you're a Christian, you're excited about your God. Unless you're anemic and you have no Bible flowing through you. Both of these spheres of devotion, private and public, have to remain connected, otherwise they all, they both fall apart. Calvin continues here. He says, "It is indeed a heartless matter to speak of the law of God abstractly as we see hypocrites do, who talk very fluently about the whole doctrine of godliness, to which they are entire strangers. What the prophet noticed

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that's, "prophet" is Calvin's way of referring to the psalmist here what the prophet noticed above respecting the affection of the heart for God's law, he now likewise applies to the lips, to the mouth."

So in view of the need of a pure hearted disciple to worship God in private and in public, in light of how often our speech is foolish and unprofitable speech, the psalmist prays, "Teach me your statutes." You're God, I'm your dependent disciple, teach me and I will praise you, both in private and in public.

So, seek God with a pure heart, praise God with pure lips, finally, third commitment, see God with pure eyes. Seek G, God with a pure heart, praise God with pure lips, see God with pure eyes. Final section, verses 14 to 16. It goes from the heart to the lips and now the eyes. "In the way of your testimonies I delight as much as in all riches. I will meditate on your precepts and fix my eyes on your ways. I will delight in your statutes; I will not forget your word."

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Three short verses, notice a repetition of terms. The word, delight, used twice. The word, way, used twice in reference to God's ways. And then several terms referring to Scripture there, testimonies, precepts, statutes, word. Take the concepts of delight, God's ways, God's word, and then notice the comparative there in verse 14, "as much as in all riches." All wealth. All sufficiency of anything I need. We're gonna read about in Psalm 119 as it unfolds, the comparison between wealth, what our eyes can see, which stirs the desires of our hearts, and then the superlative value of God's word.

In verse 72 of Psalm 119, the law of your mouth is better to me than thousands of gold and silver pieces." Okay, so there's the superlative. Verse 127, "Therefore I love your commandments above gold, above find gold." Verse 162, "I rejoice at your word like one who finds a great spoil." You come upon a.

So those comparisons are made by somebody who is able to see what's valuable, to assay or to judge fine metals, gold, even fine gold. But his heart is using a different standard of valuation and judgment and assessment. In Psalm 119:111, he

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says, "Your testimonies are my heritage forever, for they are the joy of my heart." So in other words, the treasure that will remain with him forever, the payout that is gonna keep paying benefits into eternity, that 401K that just keeps on going, they are your testimonies. God's testimonies are those things.

Derek Kidner says, "Persistent theme is in the delight these sayings bring. The first reference to this, verses 14 to 16, set the tone of much that follow all the way through the psalm by the words that they use for delight and the comparison of Scripture with the riches it outshines. This is not merely a scholar's pleasure, but a disciple's pleasure, whose joy is in obedience, that is in the way of testimonies." God made us. He designed us to delight in what our eyes see.

But so often our eyes suffer from the malady of distraction, of bad valuation, wrong valuation, which is a matter of our heart informing the organ of our sight. Okay, so that's why Jesus said, Matthew 6:22, 23, "The eye is the lamp of the body. So if your eye is healthy, your whole body will be full of light." You'll make proper valuations; you'll make proper judgments.

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You'll value what you ought to value and devalue what you shouldn't be interested in.

But verse 23, "If your eye is bad, your whole body will be full of darkness. And if then the light that is in you is darkness, how great is the darkness!" In case anyone misses the point, Jesus went on to take it one step further, make the connection really clear. He's talking about money. He's talking about stuff. Verse 24, "No one can serve two masters, he'll either hate the one, love the other, be devoted to the one, despise the other. You cannot serve God and money."

We can never let money, stuff, or the advantages that influence of money and stuff can get for us, we can never let that have our hearts. But there are so many ways that we become distracted from this. We need to keep asking the question, what is my heart wanting? What does my heart desire? And then the follow up question. Is that want, is that desire godly or ungodly?

So what does that require us to do? Value the judgment of God's word. So after several positive affirmations of commitment here,

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"I will mediate," "I will fix my eyes," "I will delight," he ends with a negative commitment, "I will not forget your word." Biblically we need to see that when it comes to God and his word, remembering and forgetting are moral issues. No one can stand before God claim an exception to obedience for a bad memory. God doesn't accept that.

One commentator said, "In the Old Testament, to forget God means much more than inability to remember. It can be described as a guilty forgetfulness or being false to his covenant and as turning to other gods." That's why you hear repeatedly from Moses throughout the book of Deuteronomy, "You must always remember and never," what? "never forget." But the question is am I really going to make that a priority. And that's what God requires; to make him a priority so that we never forget. And that's why he says, "I will not forget your word." I, he's basically saying, "I'm prioritizing you above every other commitment, every other concern, every other thing that my eyes see."

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Father, we pray for the continued wisdom and understanding that comes from you being our teacher. So blessed are you, O God, teach us your statutes. We ask that you would help us to delight in your word, to love it, that obedience to it would be our greatest joy because we don't want to sin against you. We want to please you. But the heart of it is we want to know you; we want to be like you. So please accomplish that in us and use all that we're learning here to change us. In Jesus' name we pray, amen.