

Title: God's Word
Date: 9/13/26
Subject: The primacy of God's Word
Scripture: Psalm 119:169 - 176

The story of a Christian seeking guidance. He picked up a Bible, flipped pages and stuck in his finger (Matt 27:5): "Judas went away and hanged himself." He shook his head and flipped in his Bible again. Landed on words from Jesus (Luke 10:37): "Go and do likewise." Didn't like that one either. Tried a third time cuz the third time's the charm. Landed on more words from Jesus (John 13:27): "What you're about to do, do quickly."

A haphazard approach to Scripture can be hazardous to your health. He didn't place a high value on God's Word. We need to view the Bible for what it is.

Psalm 119 is the longest chapter of the longest book in the Bible. It was written using an alphabetic arrangement using the 22 letters of the Hebrew alphabet with 8 verses in each section. The chapter uses numerous synonyms as it speaks about the primacy of God's word and its role in our lives.

1. God's word is the authoritative guide in all matters.

Primacy isn't merely about the importance of the Bible for our lives nor merely the superiority of the Bible over other religious books, but it's supremacy as the one and final authority for establishing a relationship with God and what that involves.

V. 169 says we get understanding according to the Lord's *word*. This is the most general term of the synonyms used. It's used 23 times in the Psalm. It emphasizes that God has spoken.

Both the OT and the NT emphasize God's speaking. The Old starts with God speaking creation into existence. The NT book of John says God spoke through the word who is Jesus, who had been with God in the beginning. Later in the NT book of Hebrews, it informs us that God in the past spoke through the OT prophets but in the last days has spoken by his son - Jesus (Hebrews 1:1 - 2).

Jesus is the last and greatest revelation of God as he reveals God in human flesh. He declared that God the Father's word is truth (John 17:17). It's the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth.

Other belief systems may have part of the truth, but they don't have the entire truth. They may say "God loves people" with the idea God overlooks everything people do. That's not the God of the Bible. There's more to God than being a love dispenser, just go to him, push a button and out comes some soft, comfy love, maybe even a snuggle. He's also going to judge according to his standards.

We believe the Bible alone is without error. It doesn't need pronouncements by religious figures, new discoveries or supplemental companion books, to clarify it and give a fuller and more complete understanding.

Since the Bible holds this unique position, it alone is the authoritative guide for providing understanding – wisdom, knowledge and direction pertaining to understanding God and understanding people and their role. The Lord God provided the way for people to know him, relate to him, love him, and obey him.

A second word that describes the Bible's authoritative position is *decrees* in v. 171. It's used 22 times. The Hebrew word means "to engrave in stone." We don't know who wrote Psalm 119. Many assume it was David. Let's go with that. Imagine David when he was watching the sheep and he started to think about a girl. He could have written in the dirt "I love Naomi." To avoid embarrassment, he could've quickly rubbed it out with his feet when his brothers came. If he was a little more serious, he could've written with charcoal on sheepskin. Easy to dispose of into the fire so no one else would know. If he was really serious about the girl, he could take a metal object to hack away at a stone - carve his and her initials...with a little arrow going up, angel wings... maybe a heart surrounding it. It would be permanent and everybody could see.

God's word is engraved in stone. God did that literally with the 10 commandments. The language of this verse speaks to the permanence of scripture. It's rock solid as the source of teaching. God's word doesn't change with the times or circumstances. There's no new revelation that's supposed to add or take away from what God already has revealed. The Bible is always up to date and relevant to all cultures.

The third word used to describe the authority of scripture is the word law. There are actually two different Hebrew words with both translated into English as *law* or *laws*. The first is in v. 174 and it's used 25 times, the synonym that's most frequently used. *Law* can refer to a single command, to the first five books of Moses, or to all of Scripture. It includes the idea of teaching, communicating.

Laws is in v. 175. Other translations phrase it as *righteous laws* or *ordinances*. It's used 23 times. *Law* and *laws* speak to God revealing his will through commands, rules and instructions. They declare what's right and what's wrong for how His people are to live.

vv. 172, 176 have 2 of the 22 times where *commands* is used. God gives his orders as the commander in chief, as the supreme king, as the benevolent ruler.

Precepts, v. 173 (21 times), points to the Lord's concern about details. Jesus was asked about the most important commandment. He responded to love the Lord God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind and with all your strength and to love neighbor as yourself. The Bible says a lot more about love as it fleshes out details about how to love is to be expressed to neighbors, fellow believers, enemies, everyone.

The great evangelist D. L. Moody said, "The only way to keep a broken vessel full is by keeping the faucet turned on." We need to keep the water of God's word flowing into our lives because we are broken vessels. We leak out his word and the impact it has on us. We don't retain everything we learn from God's word. Circumstances in life can slosh it out of us. We need to keep the water of his word coming into our lives to clean our minds and our hearts and replenish what has flowed out of the cracks.

2. God's word is reliable.

You've probably already made that logical assumption based on what we've already discovered. Let's ground it in the text.

v. 172 uses the English word *word* but it comes from a different Hebrew word than was used in the end of v. 169. They're similar but there's a little bit of difference. The second usage is sometimes translated as

promise as in vv. 38 and 41 of the chapter. Another related word that adds a prefix to the root word comes in v. 170 where it's translated as promise - "deliver me according to your promises."

We can tie these together in a bow - God's word is his promise. His promise is unlike those of people. Sometimes people promise things they can't deliver or even things they have absolutely no intent of delivering. It can be a way of getting other people off their back.

The boss might promise a promotion if the person does really good work but has absolutely no intent of keeping his promise or will change the ways of evaluation. It's routine in America to make fun of politicians and their "promises."

When God gives makes a promise, he gives his word. We can depend upon it. The reason is because it's based on his character. He cannot lie. He cannot fudge the truth. What he says, he will deliver.

Another word in v. 172 continues to build the reliability of God's Word. "All your commands are righteous." Righteous and righteousness are keywords throughout the Bible. What does God mean by them?

It refers to God's character. I'm going to bombard you with a bunch of words related to righteous. God is complete moral purity, excellence, flawless, perfection, holy, just, virtuous, faithful, honest, honorable.

God's commands match the person he is. Since God is righteous and good, his commands, his statutes and his principles are righteous and good. God's commands express moral purity, flawless, perfection, justice, virtue, holiness, correct and faithful expression of what is good and what is bad. The apostle Paul declares in the NT (Romans 7:12): "The law is holy, and the commandment is holy, righteous and good."

For the writer of Psalm 119, scripture was what had been written prior that was recognized as coming from God. It was essentially the first five books of the OT that were written by Moses. It also included the words the prophets received from God. More Scripture would be added after the Psalm writer. Jesus recognized the entire OT - the writings of Moses and the prophets as well as the psalms - as being from God. After Jesus' death, the NT was written and became Scripture. We're told "all scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness so the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work" (2 Tim 3:16, 17). Writers of the NT recognize that other parts of it are scripture. Peter wrote about Paul's writings that some people dismiss them as they do "the other scriptures" (2 Peter 3:16).

3. God's word is powerful.

It's mind-altering and life-altering. We can backtrack to v. 169. God's word gives us understanding. God's word isn't given to us merely so that we can accumulate knowledge and be the best at Bible trivia. It's given to us for life change, life enhancement, life preparation for what is to come when we were with him in heaven. The Psalm says the way to respond to the revelation of who God is, what he's done and commands is to place trust in him and obey his word by putting it into practice. Lyrics to songs come to mind: "I have decided to follow Jesus"... "Trust and obey."

Some people seem to be natural born artists. Not me. They can pick up a paintbrush or pencil and create something not just recognizable but beautiful. They can't take their talent for granted, but invest time, exercise discipline and diligence to continue learning, understanding and mastering the skill.

Some people are gifted at repairing cars. Again, not me. Even those with the gift spend time, exercise discipline and diligence to continue learning, understanding and mastering the skill.

Likewise, to learn, understand and master God's word and put it into practice, takes time, discipline, and diligence - if we're going to be good students and practitioners of God's word and his desires for us. The Psalmist was a willing student: "You teach me your decrees."

V. 170 states that God will deliver according to his promise. V. 173 says God's hand is ready to help. V. 174 uses the word salvation. It means rescue, deliverance. The psalmist may have had in mind being rescued and delivered from human enemies. This was often the case for David and other writers of the Psalms. They focused on human enemies because they frequently were being attacked and needed deliverance from them. But they also focused on God's work of spiritually saving their lives and one day would be with him in heaven.

We think of the salvation that comes through Jesus Christ. "Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved" (Acts 4:12). Salvation has three time elements: God saved us when we placed our trust in Jesus Christ alone as our Savior - not our goodness or works as so many people do. God is in the process of saving us as he's making us more like him. This is in preparation for the third phase of our salvation - when we get to heaven where we'll experience the totality of what God has for us.

As we focus on our earthly existence we find that God's word sustains us (v. 175). It grants us stability. We don't have to be like boats on a storm-tossed sea. We don't have to be like leaves blown around by the wind. We don't have to be wobbly like a toddler learning how to walk. God's word gives us strength and fortifies our being. It keeps us going.

Jesus said that the words he gives are spirit and life (John 6:63). Many of the people who were quasi-followers of Jesus grumbled and turned their backs on him because he'd taught some things that had been difficult to comprehend, accept and believe. Jesus asked the 12 disciples if they wanted to leave. Peter spoke up, "Lord to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. We believe and know that you are the Holy One of God" (John 6:68, 69).

All people face the same choice – accept and believe Jesus Christ or reject him. The psalmist declared his commitment to God's Word as being the truth. He chose the Lord's precepts. God's law was his delight (v. 174). Another Psalm puts it this way: "As the deer pants for streams of water, so my soul pants for you, oh God. My soul thirsts for God, for the living God. When can I go and meet with God?" (Psalm 42:1, 2)

Many of you have gone through difficult and even horrendous challenges and experiences. You've expressed how the Lord has helped you and sustained you. Often I've heard from you, "I don't know what people do without the Lord."

Another primary activity of God is he seeks those who stray from following him (v. 176). The writer admits he'd strayed like a lost sheep. He'd gone his own way, sniffing the air for whatever smelled good and thought could please him, seeking the greener grass on the other side of the fence, wandering, not caring what kind of danger into which he might get himself. He also said he'd forgotten God's commands. He knew what God desired, but didn't care and didn't pay any attention. We stray for the Lord in the same ways – seeking something new, looking to fulfill our pleasures, not pay attention to God's word.

Though he expressed commitment to the Lord and the desire to see God's hand at work – he still failed and erred. The NIV Study Bible (119:176) has this statement: “For one who has made God's law the guide and the dearest treasure of his life, the last word can only be such a confession - and such a prayer.”

The prayer for God would be the Good Shepherd who'd seek the lost and wandering sheep and restore him. Jesus tells us he is the Good Shepherd who seeks his sheep and gives his life for the sheep.

God desires to give life and revive us when we need refreshing.

The Psalm is a prayer. The requests are the basis for a whole sermon. Not going to give a second one. Each verse begins with a request. The second part gives the reason behind the request. I touched on them but want to give them quickly.

V. 169 – Lord, give me spiritual understanding and enlightenment. V. 170 - make my supplication come before you, not anyone else and be given your attention. V. 170 - deliver me, give me freedom from enemies, from sinful habits that ensnare me. V. 173 - may your hand be ready to help me, be close by and come when I need help. V. 175 - may your laws sustain me. V. 176 - seek me when I've gone astray.

Some requests express the desire to worship and praise God. V. 171 - may my lips overflow with praise. V. 172 - May my tongue sing of your word. He wants to sing, speak and share about God and what He's done for him. He wants the entirety of his being to be directed toward the praise of God (v. 175). This isn't a plea that God add time to his lifespan so he'd have more time to be able to praise God. Rather, it's the desire that the purpose and goal of his life would be to use what God has given him to offer as a praise and thanks and worship of God

Albrecht Durer was an artist during the Renaissance and became famous at age 20. Art critics called him “the greatest mind that ever expressed itself in line.” His talent and work were admired by artists like Raphael and Bellini. Influential and powerful people tried to hire him to be their artist with promises of luxury and a life of ease.

Experts consider one of his best self-portraits was when Durer merged his physical characteristics with what he thought Jesus may have looked like. Many considered this an act of pride. Those who knew him believed it was his attempt to show that he wanted to live his life in a way that would allow people to see Jesus *in* him. (source: Our Daily Bread, 8/31/26).

Like the psalmist and Durer may we have the desire to live in praise of God so we can point others to him.