

Psalm 119: 105-112; "Your Word is a Lamp to my Feet", A Communion Sermon Delivered by Pastor Paul Rendall on February 2nd, 2008, in the Morning Worship Service.

I would like to exhort each one of you who is a Christian, here this morning, to begin to take the time to memorize portions of the Word of God. When the Word of God is there in your mind and heart, God can use it to do a gracious work in you. I memorized Psalm 23 when I was a young child. I cannot remember whether it was during the times when my dear father would have me kneel down with him by the bed and he would have me repeat after him portions like the 23rd psalm and the 1st and greatest commandment of Deuteronomy 6, and other portions of Scripture. It was truly an amazing thing because neither he nor I knew the Lord. Still, it was very profitable and good. It may also have been later when as a young adult I was asked to read my Bible and pray by some at First Presbyterian Church. And God began to impress the words of this blessed psalm upon me. But it was definitely sometime when I was a young child that I first came to hear the words that told me that God is the Great Shepherd of His sheep. "The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want." "He makes me to lie down in green pastures; He leads me beside the still waters." "He restores my soul; He leads me in the paths of righteousness for His name's sake."

Sometimes we memorize but we do not meditate upon what we have memorized. Sometimes we don't understand what we have memorized. But we need very much to understand this morning the faithfulness of God to lead his dear people into all the truth. He leads them in the paths of righteousness. He leads them to trust in His promises and to do what He commands. That is what the verses that we are studying this morning from Psalm 119 are all about. The theme of the verses is, how God leads his people on the path of righteousness to a greater obedience. These verses are telling us that when the Word of God is accompanied with the saving power and light of the Holy Spirit shining upon it; that God Himself is leading the believer in Jesus Christ, in a most definite way, to do certain things when as he walks upon the path of righteousness. "Thy word is a lamp to my feet, and a light to my path."

So to open up this theme we want to ask ourselves the question, "What are the certain and definite things that God Himself leads and teaches the believer in Jesus Christ to do, when the Holy Spirit is doing His good and gracious work in the believer's heart?" I think that if we look carefully, that we can see that there are 3 things that God teaches the believer to do in

order to persevere in his faith and grow in his relationship of obedience to Christ and His Word. He leads them to take an oath, He leads them to pray, and He leads them to incline their hearts to Him. As we will come to the Lord's table in a few minutes, let us examine ourselves, and ask ourselves, if God is leading us personally in this way.

1st- God leads the true believer in Jesus Christ to take a righteous oath that he will persevere in keeping His Word. (Verse 106)

"Your word is lamp to my feet and a light to my path." "I have sworn and confirmed that I will keep Your righteous judgments." Now this swearing and taking an oath is a thing which may seem strange to the believer in Jesus Christ. Especially when he remembers the words of Matthew 5: 33-37. Turn with me there, and I will read them to you. "Again you have heard that it was said to those of old, 'You shall not swear falsely, but shall perform your oaths to the Lord.'" "But I say to you, do not swear at all: neither by heaven, for it is God's throne; nor by the earth, for it is His footstool; nor by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the great King." "Nor shall you swear by your head, because you cannot make one hair white or black." "But let your 'Yes' be 'Yes', and your 'No', 'No'." "For whatever is more than these is from the evil one." When you read these words it seems to be telling the Christian that no swearing and no taking of oaths is a righteous thing. It should be avoided and not engaged in. But this is simply not the intention of our Lord when He said these words. Our Lord Jesus was addressing the very bad religious practice of His day among the Jews who would take oaths and swear by things in a very casual and light manner, as though they could do and keep all of their promises to God in the power of their own strength and determination. This is what he calls, "swearing by their own head." But He is saying, such a person can change nothing by his own will. He cannot make one hair white or black. He is swearing in a way which shows that he is really a promise-breaker instead of a promise-keeper. They were also swearing by heaven and earth, and by Jerusalem, taking His holy name in vain. They no doubt had cultivated this way of speaking as something which made their speech seem dramatic and important and even holy, but really all they were trying to do was to impress other men. It was really a sin against the holy God whom they professed to serve.

This is not the kind of swearing which the Bible commands. Did I say, "command"? Well, turn with me to Deuteronomy 10: 20, and you will see that it was so under the law. Here the context is the giving of the law and what God was looking for, from the people. In verse 12 it says, "And now Israel, what does the Lord your God require of you, but to fear the Lord

your God, to walk in all His ways and to love Him, to serve the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul, and to keep the commandments of the Lord and His statutes which I command you today for your good?" "Indeed heaven and the highest heavens belong to the Lord your God, also the earth with all that is in it." Do you see now why the Lord Jesus commanded that men not swear by heaven or earth? It is because heaven and earth belong to the Lord. Verse 20 says, "You shall fear the Lord your God; you shall serve Him, and to Him you shall hold fast, and take oaths in His name." You see, that oaths were not only lawful; they were commanded of the people who would fear the Lord, those who would serve Him and hold fast to Him. This is what our text is talking about here in Psalm 119.

What is an oath anyway? An oath is "a solemn appeal to God to witness to the truth of a declaration" which we or another person makes, realizing that what we are saying, God is taking notice of our words. It is a declaration of our sincerity in relation to matters of truth. A vow is a solemn promise to do something which we know would be pleasing to God. An example of taking an oath which is pleasing to the Lord can be found in 2 Chronicles 15, if you will turn with me over there. I want you to notice the context of the oath taking of these people who were responding to the word of God which was delivered to them by the prophet Azariah. In verse 2 it says, "And he went out to meet Asa and the people and said to them: 'Hear me, Asa, and all Judah and Benjamin.'" "The Lord is with you while you are with Him." "If you seek Him, He will be found by you; but if you forsake Him, He will forsake you." "For a long time Israel has been without the true God, without a teaching priest, and without law; but when in their trouble they turned to the Lord God of Israel, and sought Him, He was found by them." "And in those times there was no peace to the one who went out, nor to the one who came in, but great turmoil was on all the inhabitants of the lands." "So nation was destroyed by nation, and city by city, for God troubled them with every adversity." "But you be strong and do not let your hands be weak, for your work shall be rewarded!" The Word of God was a lamp unto his feet and a light unto Asa's path. And what was his response? Verse 8 says, "And when Asa heard these words and the prophecy of Oded the prophet, he took courage, and removed the abominable idols from all the land of Judah and Benjamin and from the cities which he had taken in the mountains of Ephraim; and he restored the altar of the Lord that was before the vestibule of the Lord." He showed his own sincerity by repentance and by having the people take an oath with him. The oath was taken to indicate to God and to each other their sincerity

and their seriousness in seeking God to find forgiveness and blessing. In verse 12 it says, "Then they entered into a covenant to seek the Lord God of their fathers with all their heart and with all their soul; and whoever would not seek the Lord God of Israel was to be put to death, whether small or great, whether man or woman." "Then they took an oath before the Lord with a loud voice, with shouting and trumpets and ram's horns." "And all Judah rejoiced at the oath, for they had sworn with all their heart and sought Him all their soul; and He was found by them, and the Lord gave them rest all around."

You will say to me, but does not the Bible warn against taking oaths and making vows that you do not intend to perform or that you believe that you cannot perform? And the answer is yes. Things that we utter in the presence of God and also in the presence of witnesses ought to be considered and weighed carefully before opening our mouths. Deuteronomy 23: 21 and following says, "When you make a vow to the Lord your God, you shall not delay to pay it; for the Lord your God will surely require it of you, and it would be sin to you." "But if you abstain from vowing it shall not be sin to you." "That which has gone from your lips you shall keep and perform, for you voluntarily vowed to the Lord your God what you have promised with your mouth." So any vow that we make is purely voluntary. What then, is being spoken about in our text in Psalm 119? The psalmist is saying, "I have sworn and confirmed that I will keep Your righteous judgments." The righteous judgments of the Lord are the things that He has decided are right and wrong, the truths related to how He is to be worshiped and served, and how we are to live our lives. The psalmist is saying that he will keep these. What if he fails to keep them? I would say to you that this is all part of what it means in our text when it says that the psalmist had sworn and had also confirmed it. He is declaring His faith in God and His word; not his faith in himself and his own strength to live the Christian life. He would consider himself bound to the keeping of the Word of God whether he succeeded or failed.

Let me give you the story of Samuel Pearce, a very godly man and friend and acquaintance of Andrew Fuller and William Carey. "It is related of Mr. Pearce, by his excellent biographer, that at the period of the first awakening of his mind--'having read Doddridge's Rise and Progress of Religion in the Soul,' he determined formally to dedicate himself to the Lord in the manner recommended in the 17th Chapter of that work." "The form of covenant there drawn up he also adopted as his own; and that he might bind himself in the solemn and affecting manner, signed it with his blood." "But, afterwards, failing in his engagements, he was plunged into the greatest

distress, and almost into despair." "On a review of his covenant, he seems to have accused himself of pharisaical reliance upon the strength of his resolutions, and therefore, taking the paper to the top of his father's house, he tore it into small pieces, and threw it from him to be scattered by the wind." "He did not, however, consider his obligation to be the Lord's as thereby nullified; but feeling more suspicious of himself, he depended solely upon the blood of the cross. The comment by Charles Bridges was, "This instance must be considered, not as an example of the entangling nature of covenant engagements, but as an illustration, by way of contrast, of the enlightened deliberation and simplicity with which they should ever be undertaken." That is the very point. God will lead men who are serious about knowing Him to take this simple oath. Their witness will be God Himself. "I will keep Your righteous judgments." This is no doubt what we have witnessed already in the waters of baptism this morning. The Samuell's were engaging in a Covenant ordinance. In it they were saying that they were sinners who needed a Savior and they have taken Christ to be their Savior. They have repented of their sins, but they will continue to repent of them, by Christ's grace, as they see sins in their hearts and lives. They are further promising that they will walk in newness of life which Jesus Christ gives them. They are not saying that they will walk perfectly. They are saying that their intention is to do so; but they also know themselves well enough to realize that that they will fail at points. But when they fail, they will be confessing their sins and trusting in the blood and righteousness of Christ to make up all deficiencies in the keeping of God's commandments, the sacrifice of Christ covering them, and the grace of God helping them on to obedience in every area of their lives. Yes, this is the kind of oath that a serious Christian takes. But when he takes it, he is fully aware that it is Christ who has taken the ultimate oath, and signed it with His blood. It is in His fulfilling the law's righteous demands that we are both saved and given grace so that we can come to the place where we take the simple oath, "I will keep Your righteous judgments."

2ndly- We find here in these verses that the Lord leads the true believer, as he goes through adverse circumstances, to pray to be revived, so that he might keep on the path, doing God's will.

(Verses 107-110)

You will notice that the psalmist took this oath during a time of intense personal affliction. Verse 107 says, "I am afflicted very much; revive me, O Lord, according to Your Word." A great part of persevering in our faith as a Christian is learning to bring every concern that we have about our inability to do and keep God's Word, directly to God in prayer. We are very

prone to bring our cares and troubles, and our lack of willingness and strength, to other people; and we often seek human help before we seek the divine assistance. This is not a good order. To learn to pray is to learn to know and realize our dependence upon God for every good thing. God is glorified in man's dependence. "The Lord God is a Sun and a Shield; the Lord gives grace and glory." "No good thing will He withhold from those who walk uprightly."(Psalm 84: 11) And so learning to walk uprightly, to discern what we should do, and how we should do it, in every given situation, is the essence of sanctification. It is in this way that we are taught; when we pray to be taught. "Accept, I pray, the freewill offerings of my mouth, O Lord, and teach me Your judgments." In other words, we praise God for what we have received in grace, through our Lord Jesus Christ, and we humbly ask to be taught as we are going through difficult and trying situations. This is God-honoring. This is obeying God's Word. This is how Christ comes to be formed in our soul more and more. We often ask ourselves, "When will this trial that I am going through come to an end?" Beloved, it will come to an end when we have, as a Christian whom God is teaching, learned the lessons of obedience to God and love to man that God sees that we need to learn.

The psalmist, and I believe it was David, says in verse 109, "My life is continually in my hand, yet I do not forget Your law." "The wicked have laid a snare for me, yet I have not strayed from Your law." He is saying that he had enemies who really lay in wait to destroy his reputation and even to take his life. But did he use their threats and the snares that they laid for him as an excuse not to continue to keep God's commandments? No, he says, "I have not strayed from your precepts." You will notice that if you read the story of David that David did not "stretch out his hand against the Lord's anointed;" that was Saul, who was envious of David's popularity and fame and feeling that he had to kill him in order to hold on to his kingly authority and position. Saul chased David around in the wilderness, seeking his life, for many years. David did not desire Saul's death or his being deposed from the position of authority that he held. He had a proper view of authority and knew that God would deal with Saul's sins in His own good time and way. At one point in time, David had Saul in the position where he could have taken his life with Saul's own spear, and yet he says in 1 Samuel 26: 22, "Here is the king's spear." "Let one of the men come over and get it." "May the Lord repay every man for his righteousness and his faithfulness; for the Lord delivered you into my hand today, but I would not stretch out my hand against the Lord's anointed." "And indeed, as your life was valued much this day in my eyes, so let my life be valued much in the

eyes of the Lord, and let Him deliver me out of all tribulation." You see how Christ-like this is, my friends? God was teaching David not to take matters into his own hands, to seek justice and revenge by taking Saul's life. He did not stray into that sinful way of proceeding.

On a previous occasion when Saul was chasing David in the wilderness of EnGedi, David and his men hid in a cave and Saul just "happened" to walk into that very cave to relieve himself. David could have killed him right there. Instead he cut off a piece of his robe and after Saul left the cave, David came out and showed it to him. He said, "Moreover, my father, see!" "Yes, see the corner of your robe in my hand!" "For in that I cut off the corner of your robe, and did not kill you, know and see that there is neither evil nor rebellion in my hand, and I have not sinned against you." "Yet you hunt my life to take it." "Let the Lord judge between you and me, and let the Lord avenge me on you." "But my hand shall not be against you." You see, my friends, this is not only what David was called to. It is what you and I are called to when people are out to get us, and they do not have any reason to do so. So as we come to the communion table this morning, let us remember the Lord Jesus, who "committed no sin, nor was deceit found in His mouth; who when He was reviled, did not revile in return; when He suffered, He committed Himself to Him who judges righteously; who Himself bore our sins in His own body on the tree, that we, having died to sins, might live for righteousness--by whose stripes you were healed." "For you were like sheep going astray, but have now returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls." We will now come to observe the Lord's Supper.

3rdly- We need to understand that God leads the true believer to incline his heart to perform His statutes forever, even to the very end.

(Verses 111 and 112)

There are two things which the Psalmist David did which you and I as true Christians should do on a regular basis, seeing what the Lord Jesus Christ has done for us in dying for our sins. The 1st is, that we remember that when we first became a Christian that we knew and we understood that we were taking God's Word, His testimonies, as a heritage forever, as it says in verse 111. When all is said and done in this life, this is our lasting inheritance. We will take nothing else with us out of this world. It is the promises and the precepts and the judgments of the Lord which we have meditated on day and night and tried to do to the glory of God and to the eternal welfare of our children and people around us. Christ's grace brought us to love God's Word in the beginning, at the time of our

conversion to Christ. He says, "If you love Me, keep My commandments." Do you love the Lord Jesus? Then think of the ways. But before you do; think of how He loved you first. He loved you when you were still a sinner and you did not want him to be your Savior. He obeyed the law so that you could be justified. He suffered and bled and died so that you could be freed from the dominion and power of sin. He rose again in order to show all men that He has triumphed over sin and death and now has the power and authority not only to judge the world, but to give victory to sinners who struggle with their sin. Will you not take an oath and swear to keep His righteous judgments? Will you not, as you come to this table, pray for grace to be revived, and praise Him giving Him the freewill offerings of your lips; that He will give you victory over all sin and strength to do God's will?

Then the 2nd thing that we should do on a regular basis is that we would "incline our hearts to perform God's statutes, forever, to the very end." This too, is something taught to us by our blessed Savior. It says in John 13: 1 - "Now before the feast of the Passover, when Jesus knew that His hour had come that He should depart from this world to the Father, having loved His own who were in the world, He loved them to the end." Judas was standing near Him to betray Him. But Jesus knowing that the Father had given all things into His hands, and that He had come from God and was going to the Father, rose from supper and laid aside His garments, took a towel and girded Himself." And He served them. He washed their feet. He said, "I have given you an example that you should do as I have done to you." "Most assuredly, I say to you, a servant is not greater than his master; nor is he who is sent greater than he who sent him." "If you know these things, blessed are you if you do them." This is what we want to learn as we come to this table now. It to love and serve Christ by loving and serving one another. May the Lord help us to do His will, no matter how hard; even to the end.