

Psalm 119: 129-136; "My Soul Keeps Your Testimonies",
A Communion Sermon Delivered by Pastor Paul Rendall on
May 4th, 2008, in the Morning Worship Service.

One of the main goals that I have had as a pastor, for each one of you that I preach to, is that you would fall deeply in love with the Word of God. It is my prayer and my fervent desire for each of you that you would be able to say with all of your heart, "Your testimonies are wonderful; therefore my soul keeps them. For it is when you come to believe that God's Word, His testimonies, are wonderful, that you will begin to have what theologians of old would call an experimental faith. An experimental faith develops in your soul when you begin to see and understand and believe that Christianity is more than the mere accumulation of knowledge. Knowledge; the knowledge of God's Word is absolutely essential to our salvation and our growth in Christ after we become a Christian. But it is the reality of how our soul receives and acts upon His testimonies that honors our God. If our soul keeps God's testimonies, then God is pleased with us, and God is honored by us in the way that we think and live, and we come to understand that we do indeed have a saving relationship with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. If we do not receive God's testimonies in the way of our soul keeping them, then we have fooled ourselves about our faith and we have misunderstood the nature of the entire Christian life. Our God is a God who looks at our heart to see if we are intending to keep His Word. Let me give you a Bible example of this.

One time when our Lord Jesus had cast a demon out of a man, he was teaching the group of people who had seen this miracle about the danger of a person's "sweeping his own house to make it clean." He wanted to try to show that man and others as well, that it is not enough simply to try to reform our own life, attempting by our own wisdom and efforts to be a Christian. He had cast out this unclean spirit out of a man, and it was not going to come back again right away. But He says in Luke 11: 24, "When a unclean spirit goes out of a man, he goes through dry places, seeking rest; and finding none, he says, 'I will return to my house from which I came.'" "And when he comes, he finds it swept and put in order." "Then he goes and takes with him seven other spirits more wicked than himself, and they enter and dwell there; and the last state of that man is worse than the first." Now Jesus was trying to teach the people who had seen this miracle and the man who had experienced it, who were all so thankful about what had happened, that this might not be the last of this unclean spirit's work upon that man. He was warning them about the possibility of "sweeping his house clean" without really having the full intention to be changed and transformed into a new person pleasing to God by the miraculous grace that he has given you or because of the miracle that he has performed upon you. He is saying that it is possible to experience miracles at the hands of Jesus and yet not draw the right conclusion about the need to strive by faith, to have a life of obedience. It is not enough to have the demon gone. The

heart must be filled with gracious influences of the Holy Spirit that will lead to an obedience which will bring glory to God.

It is amazing sometimes what conclusions that a person may draw even during the preaching and teaching of the Word of God. We find in this passage in Luke that it was possible to be watching Jesus, listening somewhat to what He was saying, realize that this was stupendous and wonderful teaching, and then to be so astonished at His teaching that you might be led to think about something related to Him that really was irrelevant to what He was trying to convey in His teaching. In verse 27, continuing on, it says, "And it happened, as He spoke these things, that a certain woman from the crowd raised her voice and said to Him, 'Blessed is the womb that bore you, and the breasts which nursed You!' But just as quick as lightning Jesus turns the saying back to her with this statement: "More than that, (or, "On the contrary") blessed are those who hear the Word of God and keep it!" You see what Jesus was doing here don't you? What this woman was saying might have been true, but this woman was thinking about what a wonderful privilege it must have been to have been the mother of Jesus; what a blessed thing it was. She was not listening to the Word of God in the right way however. Her heart and soul was not in the right place. She was enamored with motherly privilege and not with how to find the power to live a godly life. Jesus directed her back into the right way with what He said. Jesus was saying to her that it was good that she thought that His testimonies were wonderful, but he is asking; does her soul therefore keep them? This is the question that I think that each of us should ask ourselves as we come to the Lord's Table this morning. Do I consider the Word of God, God's testimonies as wonderful? And do I therefore keep them? And how can I know that my soul is keeping the Lord's testimonies? I think that we can find 3 ways from our text to be able to discern if our soul is keeping God's testimonies. 1st- Do I long for light and understanding to come to my soul? (Verses 129-132) 2nd- Do I pray to be directed by God in steps of obedience? (Verses 132-134) And 3rdly- Do I ask God to practically teach me more about His honor and His love?

1st of all - Do I long for light and understanding to come to my soul?

"The entrance of Your words gives light; it gives understanding to the simple." "I opened my mouth and panted, for I longed for Your commandments." The difference between a nominal Christian and a Christian pleasing to God is found right here. When I say, "a nominal" Christian, I mean a person who is a Christian in name only. He believes in the form of godliness but has denied the power thereof. Some people who claim to be Christians sink so low as to even deny the form of godliness. They do not consider it of great importance to come and hear the Word of God preached to them. But a Christian who is trying to please the Lord will long for light and understanding to come to his soul on a daily basis in his personal reading and meditation upon the Word of God as well as when he comes to hear the Word preached. He knows that the entrance of God's words gives him light and they give him understanding of what he should be doing with his time, his strength, his money, and all the abilities which God has given to him. He knows that as a

Christian he has received light, but he also understands that he needs more light on a regular basis. "The path of the righteous is like the light of dawn, shining brighter and brighter until the full day." This is how you can know that your soul is keeping God's testimonies; if you long for the light of God's words to shine upon and into your heart. Only God can give light and life to the soul of man.

When you have this light, you come to see yourself as simple. God's words give understanding to the simple. But once you come to know the Lord you continue to view yourself as simple. That means that you don't naturally know everything about God's will for your life. You freely confess that you must have God give you understanding in order to do what pleases him. You know that God's will is found in His holy commandments but you need light; you need wisdom and grace to know how to go about doing and keeping His commandments. This is the hardest thing to grasp for some people. Because they think that they know it all already. They think that their own mind is keen enough to grasp what God would have them to do. In fact, they would tell God and others concerned for their soul; what they would do for God. But this is not Biblical Christianity. At least not at first. Those who are young in Christ ought to see themselves as babes in Christ. They ought to see themselves as little children in the faith that need to be taught by others who are older and hopefully wiser in the faith. They need a pastor to feed them the Word of God. When light comes to you, the truth of the Bible accompanied by the Holy Spirit's power; then you will find the Bible wonderful. When truth dawns upon your soul, when you see that you have not done a good job of living your life to the glory of God, and that in many ways you have sinned against the Holy and Awesome and Majestic God who made you and fashioned you for His Holy Purposes; it will humble you greatly. It will humble you that you have been so simple-minded about life. You didn't see that you had any responsibility to God to keep His commandments or to learn to please Him. But then someone preached to you the Words of God and light came. God came knocking at the door of your heart and He had the key to gain entrance. Something of truth was shined into the darkness of your heart, and suddenly you understood. You were a sinner by nature. You loved to have your own way in everything. You thought little of how your life or your thoughts or your actions dishonored God or honored Him. You thought that your life was to be lived to yourself and you liked it that way. Serving God seemed boring. Life apart from Him seemed exciting.

But then someone spoke to you the Words of God, and because God was merciful, you heard of Jesus Christ. You heard that you yourself could not make up for any of your sins by anything that you did. You heard that God so loved you, a sinner, that He sent His Son Jesus to live for God's honor and glory in your place. You heard of how the Lord Jesus became obedient to the point of death, even the death on a cross. You believed this word because light came into your soul riding upon the words of God which were spoken to you. Without God showing you this mercy, you would be spiritually blind forever. Listen to 2 Corinthians 4, verses 4-6. "But even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing, whose mind

the god of this age has blinded, who do not believe, lest the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine on them." Satan would help our natural blindness on, to the destruction of our soul and our perishing in our sin. He would pull the wool over our eyes. But verse 5 says, "For we do not preach ourselves, but Christ Jesus the Lord, and ourselves your bondservants for Jesus sake." "For it is God who commanded light to shine out of darkness, who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ." You see, Christ is the radiance of God's glory. He has pleased the Father by doing His will in every conceivable way, and He has done it perfectly, and now He commands you, He is shining His light upon you in the preaching of His Word, that you would believe in Him. Look full in His wonderful face, and the things of this world shall grow strangely dim, in the light of His glory and grace. Jesus has done everything necessary to your having eternal life. Look to Him for it.

But, as I have said, this is only the beginning of the light shining through Jesus Christ our Lord. Turn over to Psalm 36, verse 7 with me. Here we find David, the servant of the Lord saying this; "How precious is Your lovingkindness, O God!" "Therefore the children of men put their trust under the shadow of your wings." "They are abundantly satisfied with the fullness of Your house, and You give them drink from the river of Your pleasures." "For with You is the fountain of life; in your light we see light." Why is it that people come to worship? Why is it that they draw near and to hear and listen carefully to the preaching of God's Word? It is because the entrance of God's words gives light. It is not so much that the preacher is great man; it is because God is a great God of blessing. He is the fountain of life. It is because His light is shining through the preaching of the Word in spite of the preacher's weakness and inability to command interest in it. In His light we see light. This is how we come to understand more and more, not only of what God commands, but how to carry that out in our lives. This is lovingkindness indeed! Will you not pray in your heart thanking God for such mercies as He gives in the preaching of the Word and say, "Oh, continue Your lovingkindness to those who know You, and Your righteousness to the upright in heart." All this comes to us through the Lord Jesus Christ whom we have come to remember today. Do you pant for spiritual things? Do you long to keep God's commandments? In Psalm 43: 3 it says, "Oh, send out Your light and Your truth!" "Let them lead me; let them bring me to Your holy hill and to Your tabernacle." "Then I will go to the altar of God, to God my exceeding joy." This is where you have been led this morning beloved brethren. You will, in a few moments come to the Lord's table and partake of spiritual food. You will feast upon Christ. But more has to happen than your taking the physical elements into your mouth. You must open the affections of your heart to receive Christ Himself and feed upon Him and His blessed influences of grace, anew and afresh. Will you do this? In Psalm 81, verse 10 God speaks to Israel and He says, "I am the Lord God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt; Open your mouth wide and I will fill it." This is what you must do with you heart dear believer, as you come panting and longing for God's commandments. You may

know what the commandment says, but you will need light to give you understanding and power to keep them and to do them. This Jesus gives.

2ndly- Do you pray to be directed by God in steps of obedience?

(Verses 132-134)

There are three requests which the Psalmist makes in these three verses. He asks God to look upon him with mercy, to direct his steps by His Word, and to redeem him from the oppression of men. I hope that you see that in each one of these requests that the Psalmist is expressing his entire dependence upon God. This is how the true believer comes to keep the testimonies of the Lord in his soul. It is not by his self-sufficiency; saying, "I know the commandments and I am sure that I can keep them." No, he must learn to pray. For prayer is a most necessary part of learning to obey God and live by faith in the Lord Jesus. "Men ought always to pray and not to faint," Jesus says in Luke 18: 1. Pray without ceasing," Paul says in 1 Thessalonians 5: 17 "Look upon me," God, the Psalmist says here. But do not look upon me in terms of justice, noting and thinking of how short I fall of Your glory. "Look upon me and be merciful to me, as Your custom is toward those who love Your name." This is the customary way that God looks upon all of His people. He looks upon them in mercy for Jesus sake. "Surely goodness and mercy will follow me all the days of my life," says David in Psalm 23. This is the reason that you can pray with the confidence that God will hear you and answer your prayers. It is because when you pray you are asking for God to show you mercy, which He always will for Jesus sake. Mercy is our not receiving what we so richly deserve, which is the punishment due our sins. Grace is our receiving what we so evidently do not deserve, which is favor and blessing, even though we are sinners. Do you pray for mercy as a believer? You should, I believe, continue to pray for mercy even though you have cried out for mercy to be shown to you in God forgiving all of your sins. This is because mercy is also God showing you compassion and pitying you for Jesus' sake. Turn to Psalm 61 and you will find David praying for this very thing as a believer. David is praying and asking God to hear his cry. He knows that God has protected him from his enemies in the past. God has been a strong tower and shelter to him in this regard. (verse 3) He is going to continue to trust in Him for the future. He had made vows of being faithful to God in relation to the promises of his having received the gift of eternal life and receiving the heritage of those who fear God's name. (verse 5) He says, since you have given me such exalted promises concerning myself and my kingdom, then "prepare mercy and truth which may preserve him!" "So I will sing forever, that I may daily perform my vows." Beloved, is this how you pray to God? Do you have vows that you make to Him; the promises that you make that by the grace of Christ you will do what is right and walk in his ways instead of what your flesh would want to do? That is the kind of vow that you should make coming to this table today. You will say to me, "But I find that there are great difficulties in my soul in relation to my being consistent in my obedience to God." Why should I then pray this way?" Because by God's mercy, things will change in you and you will make progress in righteousness and holiness. Paul says

in 2 Timothy 2: 22, "Flee youthful lusts; but pursue righteousness, faith, loved, and peace with those who call on the Lord out of a pure heart." Now look over at Psalm 62, verse 11. "God has spoken once, twice I have heard this: that power belongs to God." "Also to You, O Lord, belongs mercy; for You render to each one according to his work." This is why you can proceed on to vows of greater obedience. God is merciful. He sees what you, by the grace of Christ, are attempting to do, and He will reward your faith and obedience accordingly.

The Psalmist in our text also prays, "Direct my steps by Your word, and let no iniquity have dominion over me." But doesn't the believer in Jesus Christ already have the promise in Romans chapter 6, verse 14 that "sin shall not have dominion over him, for he is not under law but grace?" Yes, it is most certainly true. But part of the way that this shall become a reality in your life is when God directs your step by His Word even further along the path of righteousness to the place where you by faith will no longer "present your members as instruments of unrighteousness to sin" any longer, but you will "present yourselves to God as being alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness to God." You will be consciously praying and asking God to "let no iniquity have dominion over you." Do you do this beloved? It is very important to God and to your soul and body that you do so.

The Psalmist also prays in verse 134, "Redeem me from the oppression of man, that I may keep Your precepts." I hope that you understand that God knows that when there are people in your life who are oppressing your spirit that it is hard for you to serve him in the way that you would desire. But the Psalmist is not so much concerned as he prays, for his own deliverance as he is for God's glory. He is concerned to glorify God, to serve Him and keep His commandments even when men are not acting rightly toward him. They would have him stumble and fall, he knows. They would have him make a fool of himself and say and do something that would dishonor the God who he loves. This, he prays, would never be. Christians, if they would be free from anxiety and a troubled spirit should always remember that one of the reasons that Christ died was to redeem them so that they would be set free from the fear of men. He paid the purchase price at the cross on which He died. "He was oppressed, and He was afflicted yet He opened not His mouth...." Let us remember that Christ's enduring this oppression was so that we who believe in Him would be freed from ours. Listen to the words of Zacharias who prophesied of our Lord in Luke 1: 69. "And he has raised up a horn of salvation for us in the house of His servant David, as He spoke by the mouth of His holy prophets, who have been since the world began, that we should be saved from our enemies and from the hand of all who hate us, to perform the mercy promised to our fathers and to remember His holy covenant, the oath which He swore to our father Abraham: To grant us that we, being delivered from the hand of our enemies, might serve Him without fear, in holiness and righteousness all the days of our life." This is what Jesus Christ came to do and to bring to every sinner oppressed by sin and every saint oppressed by the fear of their enemies. He is our great deliverer, our Savior

and our King. Let us come down front now and we will hear more concerning Him and partake of His supper.

3rd- If I would like to know if my soul is keeping God's testimonies, I should ask myself: Do I ask God to practically teach me more about His honor and His love? (verses 135 and 136)

The Psalmist had learned to do this. In verse 135 he says to the Lord, "Teach me Your statutes." But just before he says this he had prayed, "Make your face to shine upon Your servant." He wants to know that the Lord will give him a sense of His blessing and favor when he is in this difficult situation of being oppressed by men. He wants to learn the lessons that God would teach him while he is in this state of difficulty. He cannot see how God can be honored by men who do not keep His law. And yet we do not find him angry and indignant about their disobedient and wicked ways. We find him weeping over them. As we come to observe this Lord's Supper each one of us should pray and ask to be taught more about God's honor and God's love. God's is not honored by the words, the actions, or lives of wicked men. "Righteousness exalts a nation, but sin is a reproach to any people." (Proverbs 14: 34) God is concerned with His honor, and so we also should be concerned with it. Since God has "made His face to shine upon us" in giving us the forgiveness of all of our sins in Jesus Christ; then can we not pray to become more like Him in the way that He wept for sinners? In Luke 19: 41 and following we have an account which follows the triumphal entry of Jesus into Jerusalem. He knew that there had been a general rejection of Himself, His ministry and His miracles and the kingdom that He came to bring, by the scribes and the Pharisees, and the rulers of the people. It was because they were self-righteous sinners who thought that their being religious was enough to merit God's favor and everlasting life to them. They persecuted Jesus because of these sins in their hearts and lives. And yet what do we find our Savior, Master, and Lord doing? It says, "Now as He drew near, He saw the city and wept over it, saying, 'If you had know, even you, especially in this day, the things that make for your peace!' "But now they are hidden from your eyes." I believe that we should conclude from this; that if Jesus could weep over sinners who He knew were resisting Him and would not come to Him to find light and life and peace; then why cannot we also? We are representing our Master in this World. We have received light, we have received mercy, and our lives have been redeemed from all distress by what our Lord Jesus has done for us. Can we not also ask to be practically taught how to love men, how to weep over them? It is not only that they are perishing, but it is that God's honor is at stake. "Rivers of water run down from my eyes, because men do not keep Your law." That is God's honor. But Jesus weeping over Jerusalem, that is God's love. Let us pray that we might be taught these lessons practically as we come to partake of these elements. Let us pray to become more like our blessed Savior.