

The Purpose of the Word of God :
An Interpretive Commentary on PSALM 19: 7 - 11
By Barry McWilliams

Three passages are significant in considering the purpose of the Bible. The key passage on the Inspiration and Authority of Scripture is of course, **2 Tim 3:16,17**; however, the Bible has its own exposition on this truth in two Old Testament passages: **Psalm 19:7-11** (where its purpose is defined) and **Psalm 119: 1 - 176** (which teaches us how to apply and use the Word.)

7) THE LAW OF THE LORD IS PERFECT, REVIVING THE SOUL.

"**LAW**" is considered in its widest sense, including all Divine Revelation (both law and gospel) as the guide of Life. Lit.: "That which is taught" - i.e. divine instruction. Cf Psalm 1:2, Psa 119:97. There is conveyed here a sense of completeness and perfection. It brings life to our souls. God's Word is a source of Grace for souls that need reviving. (Some versions use "converting" here). Before the Word can do anything else, we must be made alive - revived. Cf. Psa 119:29, 77, 174. Even taken in a narrower sense - as the Moral Law (the 10 Commandments), we can derive the same meaning in that these commandments cover every area of life in terms of both what we should and what we should not do. (See the Westminster Shorter Catechism Qsns 39-81.) Christ summarized the Law in terms of loving God and loving our neighbor.

THE STATUTES OF THE LORD ARE TRUSTWORTHY, MAKING WISE THE SIMPLE.

"**STATUTES**" comes from a root word meaning "written" and emphasizes that God's Word has been permanently inscribed. Perhaps you could say "Carved in stone". "Statue" comes from the same latin root. (Note: the Hebrew word used here is usually "**TESTIMONY**"; cf. NASV.) The word "**DECREES**" (Psa 119:5) is quite similar in meaning, remember the unchangeable decree that put Daniel in the lion's den. God's Word is neither changing nor vague. We have God's Word in a form that can be studied and reflected upon ("**MAKING WISE THE SIMPLE**" - the word "**SIMPLE**" contains the idea of those who are humble and teachable disciples), it is unchanging and completely trustworthy. Cf Psa 119:24, 99, 125, 144.

8) THE PRECEPTS OF THE LORD ARE RIGHT, GIVING JOY TO THE HEART.

"**PRECEPT**" stresses that which we are responsible before God to carry out. A "**PRECEPT**" is a charge stressing our responsibility, not just to adhere to the letter of the law, but to be everything God has revealed in His will for us to be. (Psa 119:4) True happiness comes in life when we are living in accordance with the will of God. No other way of life will make us happy or satisfy the desires of the heart. In a sense, like a "prescription" the Word of God brings healing and joy to the heart - it's the right medication for our hearts. cf. Psa 119:45, 93.

THE COMMANDS OF THE LORD ARE RADIANT, GIVING LIGHT TO THE EYES.

"**COMMANDS**" views the word in terms of conditions that God has placed upon us and emphasizes both their authority as coming from our Sovereign God, and the guidance and direction which we find in the Word of God. Thus The Word of God both draws our eyes to truth and serves as "a light to our path and a lamp to our feet." (Psa 119:105) cf. 10, 32, 35

9) **THE FEAR OF THE LORD IS PURE, ENDURING FOREVER.**

"**FEAR**" views the Word in terms of our proper response to it - "to fear" is to love and reverence. Unfortunately the negative connotations of our modern usage obscure the positive side of respect and awe in the presence of God in view here. The same awe carries over into what He has spoken to us. We must receive it as God's Word and use it to cultivate inward piety in our hearts. (Psa 34:9; Prov 1:7; 14:27; 22:4; Isa 33:6.) By calling it "pure", we are taught that all of God's Word whether Old or New Testament, history, prophecy, proverb, commandment or doctrine - is complete and important to us - we should not neglect any part of it - nor should we try to add to it. It is not a mixture of truth and error (as liberalism suggests) - nor of obsolete "law" superceded by Grace. Psalm 119 is commentary on using the Word to grow in Christ. What it produces endures forever. God's Word stands firm as so does what it can accomplish in our hearts.

THE ORDINANCES OF THE LORD ARE SURE AND ALTOGETHER RIGHTEOUS.

"**ORDINANCES**" is "**JUDGMENTS**" in some versions, and in the NIV "**LAWS**" in Psa 119. This word conveys the idea of justice and authority. (Think of "ordinances" as coming from a court of law). cf. Deut 1:17; Psa 119:75, 137, 160; Jer 1:16. Hence the stress on their truthfulness (sure) and on their righteous nature. From a believer's vantage point, we see the justice of God, which delivered us from our sins through Christ. In Him, we are pronounced righteous by the highest court in heaven or earth. cf. Psa 119:149, 156. We find security in God's declared Word of forgiveness and redemption.

Observe carefully that in these six descriptions of the purpose of the Word and their effects there is a definite progression: the Word first "revives", then it "makes wise", then it "brings joy" (makes happy), it "gives clear direction", and creates a new attitude of heart, established upon God's righteous justice. The convert becomes a disciple, rejoicing in Truth, walking obediently, with fear and reverence, finding in the Word of His God security based upon God's declared justice and righteousness.

The Word is perfect, trustworthy, sure, radiant, right, and pure; altogether righteous and enduring forever. Hence, the Psalmist's delighted response to the Word:

10) **THEY ARE MORE PRECIOUS THAN GOLD, THAN MUCH PURE GOLD.**

Earthly treasures are precious and desirable, most of all Gold, which doesn't tarnish or rust. The eternal life we find offered to us in God's Word is much more to be desired and sought.

THEY ARE SWEETER THAN HONEY, THAN HONEY FROM THE COMB.

The sweet and pleasurable things of life are nice, but much more the sweetness and pleasure of knowing God and of having the bitterness of sin removed from our hearts. There is nourishment in the Word to sustain that sweetness day after day.

11) **BY THEM IS YOUR SERVANT WARNED;**

We are warned by the Word of our duty, our danger and that God alone can deliver us. God's Word is not idle reading, it is a message of life and death. In showing us our sin and our lack of holiness it drives us to Christ Jesus for mercy.

IN KEEPING THEM THERE IS GREAT REWARD.

The reward of keeping the Word of God is not a wage, but a longed for gift. (Rom 6:23) To keep God's word involves meditating and hiding God's Word away in our hearts, it means we must not neglect it, and must obey it. In embracing God's Word, in obeying and keeping it, we have the best possible reward - our life, our treasure, our hope is in Christ and the glory we shall have when we are united fully with Him.

Psalm 119: 1-176 is an acrostic poem with each verse of each group of 8 verses beginning with a successive letter of the Hebrew Alphabet. 22 groups of 8 verses each. Psalm 119 refers to the Scriptures in 175 of its 176 verses- each verse a distinct reflection on role of the Scriptures in bringing us to perfection. To reflect on just one verse a day would open us and draw us to the Scriptures and beyond them to the Lord behind them.

There are ten words for the Scriptures used in Psalms 19, and 119: **Law**, used in its widest sense, including all divine revelation as the guide of life. **Testimonies**, used to describe God's affirmation of His person and purpose. (His "record" of His dealings with man.) **Ways**, used to describe a defined roadway of Gen 18:19, Isa 55:7f). **Precepts**, referring to the responsibilities God places on His people. **Statutes**, from a root for "written" referring to their permanent inscribed form. **Commandments**, which looks at the covenant in terms of conditions. **Judgments**, which conveys justice and authority in the ordinances. **Word**, conveying the power of God's spoken word, and another word also translated **Word** or **promises** emphasizing God's Covenant of Grace). Finally, **Way(s)** in vs. 15 of Psa 119 meaning a defined path or highway to life.

Some devotional exercises:

1. Try substituting "The Lord Jesus Christ" for any of the names of the Bible given in Psalm 19 and 119 - it will be a rich and meaningful devotional experience.

1. Begin memorizing Psalm 19: 7-11.

2. Using the the above commentary, make a "chart" defining the expressions used in Psalms 19 and 119 to describe the Word of God.

3. Begin devotionally reading Psalm 119, 8 verses a day, in the NIV Bible. Keep a written diary of personal insights and applications.