Psalm 119:97-104, 105-112, 113-120 • Mem, Nun & Samekh (#13-15)

Introduction

Note: Each stanza of Psalm 119 is a study in and of itself. For the purposes of leading a small group study, these three are presented together as a single study.]

It should not surprise anyone that Psalm 119 is the largest of the 929 chapters in our Bible as it is dedicated to not only explaining how Scripture is organized by its consistent use of 8 categories of God’s Word, but repeatedly provides real world examples of how we are to apply every facet of God’s Word to our life. The goal is not to determine what we can expect from God’s Word, but that which we need to do to meet the personal shortfalls of what God’s Word expects from us.

97 O how I love Your law!
It is my meditation all the day.
98 Your commandments make me wiser
than my enemies,
For they are ever mine.
99 I have more insight than all my teachers,
For Your testimonies are my meditation.
100 I understand more than the aged,
Because I have observed Your precepts.
101 I have restrained my feet from every evil way,
That I may keep Your word.
102 I have not turned aside from Your ordinances,
For You Yourself have taught me.
103 How sweet are Your words to my taste!
Yes, sweeter than honey to my mouth!
104 From Your precepts I get understanding;
Therefore I hate every false way.

[Read v.97-104] The Power of Meditation

Q: What is the key action where our approach to God’s Word is concerned, which is repeated twice in these verses?
A: “Meditation”. (v. 97, 99) It is incorporating God’s Word into our prayer life so that they are inseparable.

Observation: Scripture rarely advises us to simply “read” God’s Word; the two most often used commands are to “study” and “meditate”. This is because while prayer is the way WE talk to God, His Word is the way He most often talks to US. Without incorporating the Word in this way, prayer is a one-way conversation.

Q: How would meditating on God’s commandments (v.98) make one “wiser than my enemies”?
A: By definition a commandment is a requirement for someone who has entered into a covenant relationship with God. Therefore, by default, a believer’s enemies are in a relationship with Satan, something which can be characterized even beyond just being unwise.

Q: How would meditating on God’s testimonies (v.99) provide “more insight than all my teachers”?
A: By definition a testimony is God personally bearing witness to the benefits and/or consequences of obedience or disobedience where His Word is concerned. It is addressing the necessary issue that we pay more attention to God than man, even if our teachers are likewise believers.

Q: How would meditating on God’s precepts (v.100) provide understanding “more than the aged”?
A: By definition a precept is something required after a person enters into a covenant relationship with Christ. It is addressing the fervor with which one pursues their personal sanctification as it relates to obedience to His Word and ways, something a long-time believer has been engaged in longer than most.

Q: How do v.101 & 102 describe additional requirements on our part where our personal behavior is concerned?
A: “I have restrained my feet from every evil way” is a proactive stance against personal sin, combined with doing so consistently as indicated by, “I have not turned aside”. It is avoiding part-time obedience to engage in full-time obedience.
Your word is a lamp to my feet
And a light to my path.
I have sworn and I will confirm it,
That I will keep Your righteous ordinances.
I am exceedingly afflicted;
Revive me, O LORD, according to Your word.
O accept the freewill offerings of my mouth, O LORD,
And teach me Your ordinances.
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 gone astray from Your precepts.
I have inherited Your testimonies forever,
For they are the joy of my heart.
I have inclined my heart to perform Your statutes
Forever, even to the end.

Q: What might be a surprising benefit according to v.103?
   A: It is both enjoyable and refreshing to be in such a lifestyle.

Q: How does this ultimately change our attitude and behavior?
   A: Instead of entertaining the notion of, and sometimes pursuing, false ways, we come to hate them, and actively avoid them.

Application: This all comports to the theme of meditating on God’s Word, meaning that it is not just never out of our thoughts, but that we can no longer even entertain an alternative to first and foremost obey it.

[Read v.105-112] The Light of the Word

Q: In the context of these verses, why is the lamp of God’s Word so badly needed where the world is concerned?
   A: “I am exceedingly afflicted” (v.107) and “The wicked have laid a snare for me”. (v.110) In times of spiritual darkness, we are even more dependent on the light of God’s Word to illuminate the sole path to which we need to cling.

Q: But how does v.109 identify an additional threat?
   A: “My life is continually in my hand” indicates freewill and choice, and the ever-present danger of making a personal decision contrary to God’s Word and ways.

Q: How are “the wicked” trying to take advantage of this?
   A: By laying “a snare”, (v.110) something intended to take us away from the Lord. The remedy is to not go astray from God’s Word, particularly in the case of His precepts, those things which are specifically required of a believer maintaining a right relationship with God.

Q: What is the believer’s inheritance which matters in this life?
   A: “Your testimonies forever”. (v.111) For believers this is God’s assurance of the benefits of obedience to His Word, and to the wicked the assurance of the consequences for disobedience.

Q: What is the kind of commitment to obedience which is required when it comes to God’s Word?
   A: “Forever, even to the end”. (v.112) We are to never turn back.

Application: God’s Word will always provide enough illumination to allow us to keep to the proper path. As Jesus IS the Word, we can see why, in eternity, there is no need for any other Light.

And the city has no need of the sun or of the moon to shine on it, for the glory of God has illumined it, and its lamp is the Lamb. — Revelation 21:23
[Read v.113-120] The Right Response

Q: What are the four types of non-believers identified and what do they all have in common?

A: They are the “double-minded” (v.113), “evildoers” (v.115), “those who wonder”. (v.118), and “the wicked” (v.119) They are all different types of straying from God’s Word.

- Someone who is “double-minded” cannot submit to God’s law—His “torah” or instruction, because they vacillate between two or more opposing opinions.

  Elijah came near to all the people and said, “How long will you hesitate between two opinions? If the LORD is God, follow Him; but if Baal, follow him.” But the people did not answer him a word.(1 Kings 18:21)

- An “evildoer” acts in direct contradiction to God’s Word and ways and actively pursues an entirely opposite manner from God’s Word.

- Someone who wanders is not making a commitment to anything, much less God.

- And the “wicked” are ultimately removed because they are the active agents of Satan and sin.

Q: What is the most significant contrast between the believer and these types of non-believers as articulated in v.120?

A: The believer in THIS life fears God (“my flesh trembles for fear of You”), knowing from His “case law” (“Your judgments”) that there are no loopholes.

Observation: It is interesting to note that in the Gospels, Jesus spends far more time and energy warning about hell than speaking about heaven.

Q: While these various types of non-believers attempt their shenanigans, what is the appropriate response for the believer?

- (v.114) “You are my hiding place”
- (v.114) “...and my shield”
- (v.114) “I wait for Your word”

Application: The right response to the total spectrum of non-believers is God’s Word. It hides us, protects us, and always comes at the appropriate time.

So will My word be which goes forth from My mouth; It will not return to Me empty, Without accomplishing what I desire, And without succeeding in the matter for which I sent it.(Isaiah 55:11)
Overall Application

Q: What is the difference between “reading” and “meditating”?
A: “Reading” is an informational approach, but “meditating” is incarnational—that is, the process by which God’s Word becomes a part of us.

Q: How might that be important when it comes the working of the Word as our light?
A: Whereas an informational approach may show something about God’s path, when the Word becomes a part of us we do not allow ourselves to stray from the path—we follow up with obedience.

Q: How might these teachings actually successively lead into each other?
- We incorporate God’s Word into our prayer life.
- God’s Word illuminates our way.
- God’s Word works in us personally and as a visible witness.