Introduction

[Note: Each stanza of Psalm 119 is a study in and of itself. For the purposes of leading a small group study, these two 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.

Read verses 161-168: Love for Your Word

Q: How might the issue, “Princes persecute me without cause” (v.161) be associated to something relevant that we might experience in our own life?

A: This is easily substituted for governmental persecution and/or harassment.

Q: But like all the other types of opposition identified in Psalm 119 as originating with various types of human antagonists, how is the response still exactly the same as previously and repeatedly rendered?

A: “…but my heart stands in awe of Your words” (v.161) is exactly in line with every reaction to persecution, opposition and unfair treatment, to remain steadfast in obedience to God’s Word and ways regardless.

Q: What is the main thought being conveyed where God’s Word in general is concerned?

A: It is not just admiration for the Word or obedience out of fear, but a genuine love for it.

- (v.161) “…my heart stands in awe of Your words.”
- (v.163) “…I love Your law.”
- (v.167) “…I love them [Your testimonies] exceedingly.”

Q: And what is the chief benefit listed of this deeper relationship with God’s Word?

A: “Those who love Your law have great peace, and nothing causes them to stumble”. (v.165)

Application: It is not peace as the world defines it which obedience to God’s Word and ways engenders, but the peace which comes to a believer who is living sin-free and in perfect character with His Word, what is here referred to as not stumbling.
Q: What are the proper actions to be taken which are listed in v.166-168 undertaken by believers concerning God’s Word?

- (v.166) “I...do Your commandments.”
- (v.167) “My soul keeps Your testimonies...”
- (v.168) “I keep Your precepts and Your testimonies...”

**Application**: How well do we recognize that biblical obedience is love-based? When we have an authentic relationship where we truly love someone, we have no issues of submission or compliance because incorporation of the rules is simply a pleasant part of that experience. We willfully limit our behavior.

Q: What is significant about the closing confession, “For all my ways are before You”?

A: It is recognition that nothing is hidden from Christ.

Q: How does this fit in with the overall experience of love for His Word?

A: It is the conscience realization that there is no fear of everything being an open book to Christ when we are walking in accordance to His Word. His ways become our ways.

**Application**: We need to recognize that our personal love for Christ must go hand-in-hand with our acknowledgment of the Apostle John’s foundational teaching that Christ Himself is “the Word”. (Jn. 1:1-5) We cannot love one with the other, which means not merely reading or listening to the Word, but becoming “an effectual doer”. (Ja. 1:25) There is no authentic love relationship with Christ in the absence of complete obedience to His Word.

“You shall not worship them or serve them; for I, the LORD your God, am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children, on the third and the fourth generations of those who hate Me, but showing lovingkindness to thousands, **to those who love Me and keep My commandments**.

Exodus 20:5-6

“If you love Me, you will keep My commandments.

John 14:15

“If you keep My commandments, you will abide in My love; just as I have kept My Father’s commandments and abide in His love.

John 15:10
Read verses 169-179: The Word & Prayer

Q: Why might this closing section be surprising where the activity of prayer is concerned?
   A: Although in each of the 22 instances the writer is obviously engaging in prayer, he rarely addresses the subject directly as provided here.

Q: Why do you suppose that is?
   A: Because true, biblical faith is first and foremost grounded in obedience to God’s Word and ways, for which no amount of prayer can act as a substitute.

Point: A common false teaching is that “faith” is believing in something hard enough that God is moved to materialize it, especially in the areas of personal finances, health and worldly comfort. It is a false faith which is more akin to blowing out the candles on a birthday cake and wishing really hard for a pony. Biblically speaking, where there is no obedience to God’s Word, for the believer there can be no authentic faith.

Q: What are the aspects of prayer which are presented here? And what is the requested response to each action?

- (v.169) “Let my cry come before You…” This is not a cry of desperation, but the Hebrew expression of rejoicing or making a joyful noise. The expected response is, “Give me understanding according to Your word.”

- (v.170) “Let my supplication come before You…” A “supplication” is usually a request for mercy for oneself or others in the form of a prayer. The expected response is, “Deliver me according to Your word.”

- (v.171) “Let my lips utter praise…” Biblical praise is completely devoted to the elevation of the character and working of God and completely devoid of any aspect of our self. The expected response is, “...teach me Your statutes.”

- (v.172) “Let my tongue sing of Your word…” This is describing one’s testimony, not just making music. There is no expected response, but rather further personal affirmation, “For all Your commandments are righteous.”

Point: Notice how this is not some kind of “wish list” for something material or of benefit in this world, but approaching God in affirmation and praise of what His Word works in us.

Application: Because we most often employ prayer when things are wrong due to our own disobedience to God’s Word, it is consumed with pleas for some kind of divine remedy. In this example, going to the Lord in a condition of obedience results in an overwhelming attitude of praise and thanksgiving.
Q: What is the actual list of requested actions being submitted?

- (v.173) “Let Your hand be ready to help me...”
- (v.175) “Let my soul live that it may praise You...”
- (v.176) “...seek Your servant...”

Q: What is the reciprocal response on behalf of the believer for these things?

- (v.173) “…I have chosen Your precepts.”
- (v.174) “…Your law is my delight.”
- (v.175) “…let Your ordinances help me.”
- (v.176) “…I do not forget Your commandments.”

Application: A prayer life which fails to not merely incorporate God’s Word, but falls short of seeking an even greater personal commitment to it, is at best marginal. Such reveals both a wrong set of priorities and a shortfall where pursuing a deeper relationship where Christ is concerned.

Overall Application

Q: How might these final two teachings summarize the most important themes of Psalm 119?

A: For those who actually and consistently put God’s Word into practice, they don’t simply admire or revere it, but come to love it; it therefore becomes an essential part of one’s prayer life.

Q: What is the advantage enjoyed by those who truly love God’s Word?

A: Because they are faithful to it regardless of the circumstances, their prayer life will be in alignment with God’s will. Their love for and relationship with Christ will be in complete alignment with the Truth.

Application: What does this say about someone who claims to love Jesus but rarely if ever reads, much less studies, their Bible? To what degree are your prayers formed around the truth of God’s Word? If, as John states, Jesus IS “the Word”, why don’t we approach and observe it as if we are in His very presence?