

LOYALTY TO GOD AND HIS WORD
PSALM 119:113-120

Pastor Matt Woodley tells the story of a softball game he played in a number of years ago:

...the umpire made a call that incensed our coach. My coach didn't agree with the ump's interpretation of a specific league rule. The game stopped, and a heated discussion ensued. Finally, the ump sighed as he pulled a rulebook from his back pocket and proceeded to read page 27, paragraph 3b, section 1. "As you can clearly see," he concluded, "this rule means that my call must stand." Unconvinced, my coach yelled, "But you're not interpreting that rule correctly." To which the ump replied, "Uh, excuse me, I think I should know: I wrote the rulebook." After an awkward silence, my coach walked back to the bench, shaking his head and pointing to the ref as he told us, "Get ahold of that guy. He wrote the rulebook!"

Isn't that so like us? We are prone to dispute the rules of our lives and then argue against those who wrote the rules. That's true spiritually as well. It might be *particularly* true spiritually. Even when we have been saved from sin by Christ and even when we love Christ and want to be obedient to Christ, we still have the flesh and remaining sin, and it is the continual work of the flesh to push against God and His Word and entice us to rebelliously sin. Our spirits — our inner man — want to obey, follow, and be loyal to Christ and our flesh wants to destroy our loyalty to God and make us loyal only to ourselves.

The world, the flesh, and the devil are constantly enticing us to be disloyal to God and loyal to ourselves.

Is it possible to remain loyal to God? Is it possible to be faithful to God? Is it possible to resist the flesh? Yes! Psalm 119 continually and repeatedly affirms that the Bible is powerful and authoritative to help the believer in his fight against sin. In the 15th stanza, (Psalm 119:113-120) the psalmist explains the hope for our relationship to God, Scripture, and sin this way:

WHEN OPPOSED BY SIN AND THE WORLD, REMAIN LOYAL TO GOD.

In this passage, we see three ways to maintain loyalty to God and His Word:

1. Be Loyal to God by the Way You **FIGHT SIN** (vv. 113-115)
2. Be Loyal to God by Seeking His **HELP** and **PROTECTION** Against Sin (vv. 116-117)
3. Be Loyal to God by **RECOGNIZING** and **FEARING** His Wrath Against Sin (vv. 118-120)

1. Be Loyal to God by the Way You FIGHT SIN (vv. 113-115)

- In these opening three verses we find the psalmist's commitment to the Word of God. These verses reveal his mindset — what is he thinking and how is he preparing to fight sin and pursue God? This stanza seems to anticipate our NT understanding of sanctification — put off, put on, renew — and these three verses are the “put off” part of sanctification. It is what the psalmist commits to stop doing...

• Fight sin by HATING sinful hypocrisy (in others and yourself) (v. 113a)

- ✓ In previous stanzas, the psalmist has talked about oppression from others through affliction and persecution (e.g., vv. 67, 71, 75, 92, 107, 153). In this stanza, he talks about affliction that is a temptation to sin — he perpetually has to fight sin's temptation.
- ✓ This psalmist's first step in fighting sin is to affirm his hatred of sin; specifically, he says, ***I hate those who are double-minded.***
 - Now my mother (and probably yours, too) taught me not to say the word “hate.” It's a strong word, but it's an appropriate word for certain situations.
 - In fact the psalmist uses it 41x in the psalms and three more times in this psalm (104, 128, 163).
 - In those other verses, he hates deviant and defiant behavior; here he hates the deviant person.
 - This is appropriate, because God hates evil; to hate evil and evil-doers is to put ourselves on the side of God and to think the way God thinks. To hate evil and evil-doers is to hate the actions and people that God has rejected; it is to put ourselves “on the side of divine judgment.” [Zemek]
- ✓ Specifically, the psalmist hates the ***double-minded***. These are people who are inconsistent, divided, disunited, and fickle. The Gk. translation of the OT uses the word “lawless” (against the Law). They have two opinions about life, and they cannot decide which way to go. There is no resolution to follow God; they are prone to following the latest fad and whim. They are half-hearted. They know they *should* love God, but they have no resolution to follow Him. And they are unstable (Is. 1:8).
- ✓ When he says, “I hate those who are double-minded,” we immediately think “he hates others who are double-minded.” But isn't it true that at times we are all prone to being double-minded, hypocritical, and pharisaical? Don't we all have a tendency to not do what we know is right? When the psalmist says he hates this in others, it also means he hates it in himself. He also hates what this duplicity does to him, and he longs for this wavering spirituality to be removed from *his* life. (It seems clear that he hates his own tendency to double-mindedness because of his requests in 116-117).
- ✓ We say it often — the first step to fighting sin is hating that sin and being intolerant of it in any of its forms (Ps. 97:10; Prov. 8:13; Rom. 12:9).
- ✓ Fight sin by hating sinful hypocrisy (in others and yourself).

- Fight sin by LOVING God's Word (v. 113b)

- ✓ To facilitate his hatred of hypocrisy, the psalmist also recommits himself to **love** God and His **law**.
- ✓ This contrast between love and hate is common in Scripture and this psalm (cf. 103-104, 128, 158-159, 163). We will learn to be resolute against sin when we cultivate love for God's Word.
- ✓ We will either be loving sin and hating God's Word or loving God's Word and hating sin (in us).
- ✓ It is the temptation of the flesh to love sin and hate God's Word rather than hate sin and love God's Word: "Because of misplaced affections, we love what we ought to hate...and we hate what we ought to love..." [Yuille, 134.] Cf. In. 3:19; Rom. 8:7.
- ✓ Here the psalmist says that he loves God's law — the word is "Torah," but it means more than the first five books of the OT — it represents all Scripture, everything God has said and commanded.
- ✓ He loves all Scripture — he has affection for all of it and desire for all of it. There is no part of it he doesn't want. He delights in all of it.

"We should love what God loves and delight in whatever he says. God does not lay down arbitrary rules. He does not give orders so that we might be restricted and miserable. He never requires what is impure, unloving, or unwise. His demands are always noble, always just, and always righteous." [DeYoung, *Taking God at His Word*, 18.]

- ✓ What are you doing to stimulate your love for God's Word? (That's a different question from "what are you doing to take in God's Word?" We *should* take in God's Word, but we should also do it from joy and delight and not mere duty. We will only love to obey God when we love His Word.) So, what are you doing to stimulate love for God's Word?
 - Consider how the psalmist commits to and teaches himself to love God's Word (vv. 47, 48, 97, 113, 119, 127, 140, 159, 163, 165, 167); and then how he delights in God's Word (vv. 16, 24, 35, 47, 70, 77, 92, 143, 174).
 - Read it often and regularly (regular exposure produces love and affection)
 - Read it slowly (meditative reading produces understanding of His love for us in His Word)
 - Read it applicationally (applicational reading produces obedience and love)

- Fight sin by seeking PROTECTION in God's Word (v. 114)

- ✓ Where is your "safe place?" For some it is a tornado shelter, or the mall (or Amazon Prime), or a TV show or book, or a vacation, or a favorite food or drink. Where do you find comfort and protection?
- ✓ Even more specifically, where do you go when you want protection from sin? In this stanza, the psalmist addresses his need for protection but not from persecutors; he needs protection from sin, temptation to sin, and sinners who will tempt him and lead him astray. Where do you go for that kind of protection? Do you even think about needing protection from sin?
- ✓ The psalmist went to the Lord — ***you are my hiding place and shield.***

- ✓ That is, the Lord was his refuge and secret place to escape sin and its temptations. God is also a **shield** to protect against the attacks of the enemy (cf. **115:9-11**).
- ✓ And in seeking protection in God, he is willing to **wait for Your Word**. He patiently waits on God. That means that he trusts God to protect him even when he doesn't receive immediate provision. He stays with God and clings to God. He doesn't abandon or reject God when temptations increase; increased temptations mean he adheres to God all the more.
- ✓ Do you fight sin by filling your mind with God's Word and by being confident in its ability to guide and protect you from temptation and sin? As we read this verse is your mind drawn to **Eph. 6:13ff**? The truth of God, along with the gospel of God, faith in God, and the sword of the Spirit (the Word of God) are able to protect us from sin and equip us to walk obediently. His Word is our protection.
- ✓ Too often, we live weakly and feebly because we take in the Scriptures weakly and feebly. What has been written in many Bibles applies here: "Sin will either keep you from this Book, or this Book will keep you from sin." Find your refuge in God's Word to keep from being enslaved to sin.
- ✓ Application: whenever you read have at least one "take away..." "What is one thing I can do, believe, think, tell... because of what I've read today?" We demonstrate that we are taking refuge in God when we are making particular plans to obey God and His Word.

• **Fight sin by taking ACTION against sin (v. 115)**

- ✓ In v. 115, the psalmist doesn't just make a commitment to loyalty to God, but he acts.
- ✓ Because he waits for the Word of God (v. 114) and hates evil-doing, he affirmatively (aggressively) demands that those who do evil leave him — **depart from me....**
- ✓ The **evildoers** he is addressing are not just his enemies, but enemies of God, those who engage in evil and delight in doing evil. The sense is that he wants them to disappear; he wants nothing to do with them. "Git outta here!" This statement is not just an address to the sinners, but it is also his way of getting himself away from their influence; he is departing from them also. Cf. **Is. 4:7-8**.
- ✓ Why is he so resolute? So that **I may observe the commands of God**. He cannot remain under the influence of ungodly friends and also be obedient to God's commands. They will distract him and deter him from being obedient and he wants to be obedient.
- ✓ The psalmist is not waiting for sin to go away but he is taking action to get away from sin, particularly paying attention to relationships that will hinder his obedience to God.
 - Are you careful about your friends? Who influences you? Do your friends help or hinder your obedience? (This is appropriate for both young and old, though younger people are particularly susceptible to the influence of others: **Prov. 1:4, 10ff; 7:7; 2 Tim. 2:22**).
 - Are you resolute in planning not to sin? Have you pre-decided what to do when tempted?
 - "Holy men often find that, in order to be holy, they have to be solitary." And, "A man who wishes to serve God, and lead a religious life, must separate himself from the society, as such, of unprincipled people."

- If we will be loyal to God in this coming year, we will need to dissociate from sin. To dissociate from sin is to associate with God and be committed and loyal to Him. Will you cultivate loyalty to God by being disloyal to sin? You will do that as you immerse yourself in God's Word.
- There's a second way to be loyal to God in this stanza...

2. Be Loyal to God by Seeking His **HELP** and **PROTECTION** Against Sin (vv. 116-117)

- These two verses are the psalmist's prayer and petition for God's help. He knows he is incapable to fight sin and defeat it on his own; he needs God's help. These verses reveal how he asks God for help. In a sense these verses are the "put on" part of sanctification. This is what he does instead of sin — instead of embracing and engaging in sin, he petitions and prays to God. And he prays in two specific ways:

• Ask God for help to **MAINTAIN** your spiritual life (vv. 116a, 117)

- ✓ He asks first that God would **sustain me**. The word sustain infers that he is needy. He is incapable of sustaining himself. He needs God to do this for him. And God will do it **through His Word**.
- ✓ And the result of God's sustaining work is that the psalmist will **live**. This life is *spiritual* life. God's Word enables him to *really* live. If you want to "live it up" (and stay alive), then go to the Bible.
- ✓ In v. 117, he similarly asks, **uphold me...** That is, he is in a distressing situation (falling? drowning?) and he needs God to hold him up so that he doesn't go down. Only God can spiritually save him.
- ✓ The only safety for anyone is in the Bible. That's why he quickly adds (117), **that I may have regard for Your statutes**. He asks God to hold him up, not so that he can engage in sin, but so that he can have regard and be focused on and attentive to obeying God's statutes. (His **statutes** refer to the binding force and permanence of Scripture; His commands are durable and eternal.)
- ✓ He wants God's help so that he can live God's way.
- ✓ We might even think of these verses as the psalmist's equivalent to Jesus' instruction about how we are to pray — "lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil" (Mt. 6:13). Later, in the Garden on the night of His betrayal, Jesus will warn the disciples, "Keep watching and praying that you may not enter into temptation; the spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak" (Mt. 26:41).
- ✓ We must fight against sin, but we will never defeat sin in our own power. We must depend on God and His power; and that power is provided in His Word and is accessed through prayer. Are we weak in our fight against sin because we haven't used the Word and we haven't asked (Js. 4:2b)?
- ✓ Years ago I was expressing a particular difficulty and dad said, "Terry, I'm your father: ask me!"
- ✓ In the NT, this kind of life comes from living dependently on the Spirit of God and the Spirit's Word (Rom. 8:11, 13). Ask God and He will help you. He may not take away the problematic circumstance, but He will give you everything you need to make it through the situation.

- Ask God for help not to be ASHAMED of or to SHAME His Word (v. 116b)

- ✓ In this verse the psalmist makes a specific prayer request — ***do not let me be ashamed of my hope.*** That is, keep me from being ashamed of You and Your Word.
 - ✓ The word ***shame*** has the sense of disappointment. He doesn't want to be disappointed in his spiritual hope. He speaks similarly in vv. 31, 80.
 - ✓ When he the psalmist mentions ***hope***, he is talking about the expectancy or evidence of our hope. The sense of the phrase is: "Do not let my hope in You prove to be vain or worthless."
 - ✓ There is a hopefulness that comes from God in His Word — we are confident that He will always act faithfully with His people. He *will* save those who are His (vv. 49-50, 165-166; Rom. 11:26-27).
 - ✓ This is the psalmist's request: "I trust you; please be faithful to do what I trust you to do."
 - ✓ This phrase also infers that the psalmist doesn't want to live in a way that will bring shame on the name of Christ. He does not want to bring disrepute to Christ that will make others think there is no hope to be found in God and His Word.
 - ✓ We can do things that will "discredit" God and His ability; we don't want the pattern of our lives to be something that is shameful and will lead others not to believe.
- Christopher Ash summarizes these two verses well: This "is a prayer to be kept single-hearted, looking intently at [God's] statutes continually, which is way of speaking of whole-hearted attentiveness to the way and walk of the word of God. He knows that perseverance is only by grace, given in answer to prayer." He wants to be loyal to God, knows he cannot be loyal on his own, so he asks God for the help that he needs to be loyal and committed to God.
 - ✓ If we are going to put off sin we not only need to put on righteousness, but we need to recognize that if we are going to do that we need God's power to do it. Jesus reminds us, "Apart from me you can do nothing" (Jn. 15:5). This prayer is an acknowledgement of that fact. Do we pray that way?
 - ✓ There is one more way to cultivate loyalty to God and His Word...

3. Be Loyal to God by RECOGNIZING and FEARING His Wrath Against Sin (vv. 118-120)

- These final verses are the "mind-renewal" part of this stanza — these are the thoughts that the psalmist thinks so that he will be faithful to fight sin and maintain loyalty to God.
- Stimulate loyalty to God by remembering His JUDGMENT against sin (vv. 118-119)
 - ✓ ~~Remember that unbelievers have no acceptance from God (v. 118).~~
 - There are people who ***wander from [God's] statutes*** — they are arrogantly rebellious against God. They have not accidentally wandered from God; they have resolutely rejected Him. And in return, God has rejected them. He has "thrown them away" and spurned and repudiated them.

- They are not accepted or embraced by God and they will be fully turned away and rejected because they **deceive** and are **useless**. They are not accepted because what they do and what they are is unacceptable to God. Everything they do and are is a lie.
- ✓ ~~Remember that unbelievers have no value before God (v. 119).~~
 - The first line in v. 119 reaffirms v. 118 — they will be rejected, **removed**, facing eternal wrath.
 - They face God's wrath because they are like **dross**. Like a metal worker who heats up metal to reveal impurities and then he scrapes and throws away the impurity, God will throw away (in eternal judgment) those who are wicked. Because they have no righteous value, God will "make them disappear" — they will cease to exist on the earth and exist only in God's infinite judgment.
 - We do well to remind ourselves that this is the end of people who entice us to sin; we are well-served by meditating on the end of unbelievers (Lk. 16:19ff; 2 Pt. 2:1ff; Rev. 20). Hell is real and God-rejecters will irrevocably go there for all eternity. We will be helped to remember that.
- ✓ ~~Remember that unbelievers have no standing before God (v. 120).~~ God is **judge** and He *will* judge. We should not fear of those who can only kill bodies; we should fear the one who judges souls (Lk. 12:5).
- ✓ If you are not a believer in Jesus Christ, this is your condition: no acceptance, no value, and no standing. You are empty of anything of spiritual value. Your only hope is Jesus Christ. If you are not a follower of Jesus Christ, you will not have an ultimately fulfilling life on earth and you will be found completely lacking in eternity (and judged for that lack of righteousness). But Jesus said that He came to give abundant life (Jn. 10:10). Every other attempt to find life will lead you to being robbed of life (Jn. 10:7-10). He is the only way and you must trust Him. And you can trust Him.
- ✓ If you are a believer, if you are going to be loyal and faithful to God, you will need to think in new ways — and one of the ways you can help yourself is to meditate on the truth of God's role as Judge. Sin should be less attractive to us (and should be of no attraction to us) when we consider that every sin will receive the full wrath of God. No sin or sinner will be unpunished. None will escape.
- ✓ And that will lead you to one final means of cultivating loyalty to God —

• Stimulate loyalty to God by cultivating holy **FEAR** of Him (v. 120)

- ✓ In v. 20 the psalmist concludes by affirming that his **flesh trembles** — he shudders in fear; his skin crawls; the picture is of "goose bumps and shuddering." He is filled with reverential awe because of the **judgments of God**.
- ✓ A believer in Christ does not need to be terrified of Hell. Christ took that wrath for us. But we should tremble as we consider what we have escaped, and we should be humbled by God who has the power to send people to eternal condemnation in Hell.
- ✓ It should also produce humility in that every sin of ours has been punished in Christ — He absorbed the full wrath of God against every one of my eternal sins. And that meditation should lead us to worship Him in reverential fear, and flee from the sins for which Christ had to die.

CONCLUSION: This morning we have consider the words of the psalmist about Scripture. Listen to the words of Solomon and his perspective on the wisdom of the Word:

My son, give attention to my words; Incline your ear to my sayings.

Do not let them depart from your sight; Keep them in the midst of your heart.

For they are life to those who find them And health to all their body.

Watch over your heart with all diligence, For from it flow the springs of life. (Prov. 4:20-23)

This Word is not just the “rulebook” written by God, it is a faithful love letter to direct us to what is best. It is essential to give attention to the Word of God and the wisdom of that Word because God has authoritatively and *lovingly* given it to us. As we give attention to it, it will transform our hearts and shape and direct our actions. We will never regret being changed and directed by God. We will always (ultimately) regret sin.

So as we head into this New Year, here are **four summary questions** for me about my loyalty to God:

- ✓ **Is my commitment to fight sin?** That is, am I *really* being intentional to push against and resist my particular fleshly inclinations? Have I identified where I am prone to sin and am I taking action against those temptations and that sin? Am I resolved to fight those sins (or am I tacitly making allowances and excuses for those sins)?
- ✓ **Am I seeking God’s help in my fight against sin?** Have I asked Him for help? Is it part of my daily prayers to Him? Am I concerned about being ashamed of His Word and bringing shame to Him because of my sin? And am I using the Scriptures that He has provided for me in my fight against sin?
- ✓ **Am I consciously aware of His judgments and do I righteously fear Him?** Do I recognize that the sin I enjoy was the cause of Christ’s death? Am I aware that some are already in Hell and others will yet go to Hell for unrepentantly engaging in the sins with which I am playing? Do I genuinely fear and respect God enough to use His Word to resist the temptation to sin?
- ✓ **Am I willing to let loyalty to God lead me to obedience to God?**

When opposed by sin and the world, be loyal to God. Friend, this year, let us be shaped particularly by the Word of God so that we are loyal to Him and disloyal to the sins that entice us.

BENEDICTION: Ps. 19:13-14