

Psalm 119:1-8 “The only way to praise God”

“Blessed are those whose ways are blameless, who walk according to the law of the LORD.

2 Blessed are those who keep his statutes and seek him with all their heart—they do no wrong but follow his ways.

4 You have laid down precepts that are to be fully obeyed. 5 Oh, that my ways were steadfast in obeying your decrees!

6 Then I would not be put to shame when I consider all your commands. 7 I will praise you with an upright heart as I learn your righteous laws. 8 I will obey your decrees; do not utterly forsake me.

Psalm 119 is filled with curiosities

(please see accompanying explanatory and note sheets).

- **It is the longest chapter in the Bible; Psalm 117 is the shortest.**
- **Psalm 119 was written in a Hebrew poetic form.**

It has no rhyme as **“Jack and Jill**

Went up the hill.”

- **Psalm 119 is an acrostic.**
- **We see many Thanksgiving and Christmas acrostics this time of year.**

Psalm 119 is a giant acrostic.

In the NIV translation, you’ll see a Hebrew letter Aleph (א) before the first verse and a Hebrew letter Beth (ב) before verse 9.

The first 8 verses in Hebrew start with the letter Aleph, and the second 8 begin with Beth and the third 8 with Gimel (ג) and continuing through the 22 letters of the Hebrew alphabet.

Psalm 119 is an expansion of Psalm 19:7-11:

“The law of the LORD is perfect, refreshing the soul. The statutes of the LORD are trustworthy, making wise the simple.

8 The precepts of the LORD are right, giving joy to the heart. The commands of the LORD are radiant, giving light to the eyes.

9 The fear of the LORD is pure, enduring forever. The decrees of the LORD are firm, and all of them are righteous.

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10 They are more precious than gold, than much pure gold; they are sweeter than honey, than honey from the honeycomb. 11 By them your servant is warned; in keeping them there is great reward.”

Throughout his psalm, the writer of Psalm 119 reused law synonyms from Psalm 19: **statutes, precepts, commands, and decrees.**

The Lord’s instruction is the theme of both Psalm 19 and Psalm 119

But in one verse of Ps. 119, no synonym for law appears.

Can you find it?

More important than all the curiosities is the Psalm’s significant truth:

Following the Lord’s instruction benefits us.

As verse 2 reads:

“Blessed are they who keep his statutes and seek him with all their heart.”

Keeping God’s commandments leads to the happiest life possible.

First century Christians found it to be true.

“Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke

bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.”¹

Can you imagine how we would all grow and mature and the church would increase if we acted as they did?

Because they were following and obeying the Lord through the Apostles’ teaching, early Christians were very happy folks.

After his baptism, the Ethiopian Treasurer: “Went on his way rejoicing.”²

First century Christians discovered joy.

The Golden Arches people didn’t invent “Happy Meals.”

Christ created them 2000 years ago.

After the prison warden in Philippi and his family became Christians, the warden brought former prisoners Paul and Silas, **“into his house and set a meal before them and the whole family was filled with joy.”³**

¹ Acts 2:46, 47 (NIV)

² Acts 8:39 NIV

³ Acts 16: 34 NIV

Something caught my eye for the first time last week.

The following thought occurred to me:

Do you suppose that Christ so changed this veteran military officer, that he actually helped his wife in the kitchen and served?

That would make millions of wives happy, wouldn't it?

Christ brings joy to people, their marriages, families, churches, and communities.

Many know their church experience to be otherwise.

They're not just unhappy, they're miserable and wretched.

My cousin, Donald was asked not to come back to a church because he “sang too loudly.”

I could understand if he screeched and snorted, but Don had a beautiful, deep, bass voice.

The folks who gave Don the boot must have been pitiful and depressing.

Some members lack cheer for another reason.

They suffer from what, in Hollywood, I termed “The California Conflict.”

Many Christians grew up in rigid churches.

They went to California to escape strictness.

They felt a sense of duty to the church.

But they experienced little joy.

Though they attended church at times, their hearts were not in it.

The look on their faces was “a holy grimace.”

Like an unwilling wife at a sandlot ballgame with her husband.

Or a guy shopping for clothes with his wife—for her clothes, I mean.

Or a scruffy truck driver having tea and crumpets with society ladies.

Nobody is more miserable than one with a divided heart.

**“The sermon now ended,
Each turned and descended.**

**The eels went on eeling,
The peels went on peeling.**

Much delighted were they,

But much preferred the old way.”⁴

⁴ Anonymous poem

Many feel that quandary.

They see a certain benefit in attending church, but they also like the world.

They have just enough religion to make them uncomfortable in the world.

But they also have so much world in them they are miserable in church.

What things divide our hearts?

Dallying with temptation certainly divides our hearts.

1. Hear what Hosea said about wine’s effects.

“Wine and new wine take away the understanding” (lit. the heart).⁵

The Scriptures never condemn wine in moderation.

Paul even urged Timothy to drink a little for his ailments.⁶

But strong drink and drunkenness have a poor record.

Alcohol abuse divides and shatters hearts, families and lives.

It has a dismal historical record.

In 2016, 10,497 people died in **alcohol-impaired driving crashes**, accounting for 28% of all **traffic-related** deaths in the United States.⁷

Cherokee County, Iowa, where we live, counted 11, 508 residents in 2016.

More people have been killed in alcohol related traffic accidents in this country since 1980 than have died in battle in US wars since WWI.

Every year an estimated 88,000 persons die from various types of alcohol related deaths.

You rarely hear politicians or preachers talk about the damaging effects of alcohol—what it does to hearts and minds, do you?

Christians can’t afford to allow alcohol to divide their hearts.

It is not my job to condemn wine makers, distillers, brewers, and sellers.

Jesus did not assign us the job of condemning

⁵ Hosea 4:11

⁶ 1 Timothy 5:23

⁷ https://www.cdc.gov/motorvehiclesafety/impaired_driving/impaired...

people of the world.

A U.S. clergyman once condemned the great actress Sarah Bernhardt as "an imp of darkness, a female demon sent from the modern Babylon to corrupt the New World." Sarah responded with a note: "My dear confrere (fellow member of a fraternity, profession), why attack me so violently? Actors ought not to be hard on one another. Sarah Bernhardt."⁸

As do many preachers of differing political persuasions, Christians keep forgetting what the Bible says about judging folks in the world:

"I have written you in my letter not to associate with sexually immoral people—not at all meaning the people of this world who are immoral, or the greedy and swindlers, or idolaters. In that case you would have to leave this world.

"But now I am writing you that you must not associate with anyone who calls himself a brother but is sexually immoral

or greedy, an idolater or a slanderer, a drunkard or a swindler. With such a man do not even eat.

"What business is it of mine to judge those outside the church? Are you not to judge those inside? God will judge those outside."⁹

God did not task Christians or their ministers with condemning the folks of the world.

We have to "love" people into God's kingdom, then show them what God's word teaches.

Judging is the Lord's responsibility.

The Lord wants Christians to challenge one another to follow God's word in Christ and to do their best for the Lord.

A church leader's task is to encourage Christians not to let their hearts become divided by alcohol or anything else.

We focus on following Jesus:

"Be very careful, then, how you live--not as unwise but as wise, (16) making the most of every opportunity, because the days are evil.

⁸ Sarah Bernhardt (1844-1923), French actress

⁹ 1 Corinthians 5:9-13 NIV

(17) Therefore do not be foolish, but understand what the Lord's will is. (18) Do not get drunk on wine, which leads to debauchery. Instead, be filled with the Spirit. (19) Speak to one another with psalms, hymns and spiritual songs. Sing and make music in your heart to the Lord, (20) always giving thanks to God the Father for everything, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.”¹⁰

“Blessed are they who keep his statutes and seek him with all their heart.”

Here's second point about divided hearts.

2. Recall the confrontation that Elijah had with the prophets of Baal? (1 Kings 18)

“Elijah went before the people and said, ‘How long will you go limping with two opinions? If the LORD is God, follow him; but if Baal is God, follow him.’ But the people said nothing.”¹¹

The people couldn't decide which god to serve.

They knew that the Lord had led them

from Egyptian slavery,

He miraculously placed the Israelites in a new land where they enjoyed a good life.

But the people were attracted to the worship of Baal, god of the Canaanites.

Why were their hearts divided?

Baal worship was extremely popular in the nations surrounding Israel.

The “everybody's doing it” argument has always been a strong sales technique.

We don't like being different.

We're afraid to stand alone.

People find security in following the majority.

It is difficult for smaller groups to keep their hearts committed to God.

They see all of those people standing on the other side.

Worrying about what the majority thinks about us divides our hearts.

Christians dedicate themselves to what God says, not what the majority considers right.

“Blessed are they who keep his statutes and seek him with all their heart.”

¹⁰ Ephesians 5:15-20 NIV

¹¹ 1 Ki 18:21 RSV

The people of Israel’s hearts were divided over Baal worship—they were “limping” about for another reason.

3. Baal worship not only permitted sexual promiscuity, it encouraged it.

Pagan religions of the day did the same. Many of them had cult male and female prostitutes.

Baal and Asherah religions promoted the pornography of their day.

The Israelites had divided hearts.

Like all folks with divided hearts, they were miserable.

They knew **in their hearts** that the God of Israel was the true God.

But they loved the permissiveness of the pagan religions like Baal and Asherah.

Pornography is not new.

Think of the heartache folks bring on themselves and their families because their hearts are divided.

Do you wonder how many opioid users have

divided hearts over wrong they are doing?

I think you’d find a direct correlation.

Currently, 1/3 of divorces result from married people getting on the internet and chatting with people of the opposite sex, then meeting them.

Something like 80% of women who start chatting with guys on the internet wind up meeting them.

The prophet Malachi informed the Israelites that the Lord would not hear their prayers or accept their offerings because they were not being faithful with their spouses.¹²

“Blessed are they who keep his statutes and seek him with all their heart.”

Serving God with an undivided heart is the only way to happiness and fulfillment.

God bless you as follow God’s Word by His Spirit.

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¹² Malachi 2:10-17

21 אֲדַבֵּר כִּי עֲנִיתִי וְהוֹדִיתִי לְיְשׁוּעָה: אֲבֹן מַאֲסוֹ הַבּוֹנִים
 22 הַיְהִי לְרֵאשׁ פְּנֵיהֶם: מֵאֵת יְהוָה הַיְהִי זֵאת הִיא נִפְלְאוֹת
 23 בְּעֵינֵינוּ: וְהִדְהִימוּ עֵשָׂה יְהוָה נִגִּילָה וְנִשְׂמַחָה בּוֹ:
 24 אֲנִי יְהוָה הוֹשִׁיעָה נָא אֲנִי יְהוָה הַצְּלִיחָה נָא: בְּרוּךְ
 25 הַבָּא בְּשֵׁם יְהוָה בְּרַכְנוּכֶם מִבֵּית יְהוָה: אֵל וַיְהוָה
 26 וַיֵּאָר לָנוּ אֶסְרִיחֶנּוּ בְּעֵבְרֵינוּ עַד-כְּרִנּוֹת הַמִּזְבֵּחַ: אֵלֵינוּ
 27 אֲתָה וְאֲדַבֵּר אֱלֹהֵינוּ אֲרֻמְמֶךָ: הוֹדוּ לַיהוָה פִּי-טוֹב כִּי
 28 לְעוֹלָם חֲסִדוֹ:

קיט Psal. CXIX. קיט
 אֲשֶׁר־י תְּמִימֵי-דְבָרְךָ הַהֲלֹכִים בְּתוֹרַת יְהוָה: אֲשֶׁר־י נִגְרִי *
 בְּלִבִּי בְּכָל-לֵב יִדְרֹשׁוּנִי: אֵף לֹא-פָעַלְתִּי עֲוֹנָה בְּדַבְּרֵי
 הַלְכוּ: אֲתָה צִוִּיתָה פִּקְדוֹתֶיךָ לְשֹׁמֵר מֵאֵד: אֲחֻלִּי יִפְנוּ
 דְּרָכֶיךָ לְשֹׁמֵר חֻקֶּיךָ: אִו לֹא-אֲבֹשׁ בְּהִבִּטִי אֶל-כֵּל
 מִצְוֹתֶיךָ: אֲדַבֵּר בְּיֶשֶׁר לִבִּי בְּלִמּוֹדֵי מִשְׁפָּטֶיךָ אֲדַבֵּר:
 אֶת-דְּבָרֶיךָ אֲשֶׁמֶר אֶל-תַּעֲזֹבֵנִי עַד-מָאֵד: בְּמַה יִּזְכְּדוּ
 נַעַר אֶת-אֲרֻחֹו לְשֹׁמֵר בְּדַבְּרֶיךָ: בְּכָל-לֵבִי דִרְשָׁתִּיךָ אֵלֵינוּ
 תִּשְׁנֵנִי מִמִּצְוֹתֶיךָ: בְּלִבִּי צִפְנֵתִי אִמְרֹתֶיךָ לְמַעַן לֹא
 אֲחַטֵּא-לֶךָ: בְּרוּךְ אֲתָה יְהוָה לְמִדְּוַי חֻקֶּיךָ: בִּשְׁפָתַי
 סִפְּרֵתִי כָּל מִשְׁפָּטֵי-פִיךָ: בְּדַבְּרֶיךָ עָדוֹתֶיךָ שִׁשְׁתִּי כַּעֲל
 כְּלִדְהוֹן: בְּפִקְדוֹתֶיךָ אֲשִׁיחָה וְאֶבִּיטָה אֶרְחֹמֶיךָ: בְּהִקְרֵאתֶךָ
 אֲשַׁתְּעִשֶׂע לֹא אֲשַׁכַּח דְּבָרֶיךָ: גְּבֹהַל עַל-עֲבֹדֶיךָ אֲחִיהָ
 וְאֲשַׁמְרָה דְּבָרֶיךָ: גִּלְעֵינִי וְאֶבִּיטָה נִפְלְאוֹת מִתּוֹרַתֶךָ:
 גֵּר אֲנִי בְּאֶרֶץ אֲלֵי-חֶסֶד מִמֶּנִּי מִצְוֹתֶיךָ: גִּרְסָה נִפְשִׁי
 לְתַאֲבָה אֶל-מוֹשְׁפָטֶיךָ בְּכָל-עֵת: גַּעֲרַת וְדִים אֲרוּחִים
 הַשְׁגִּימֵם מִמִּצְוֹתֶיךָ: גַּל מֵעַל חֶרְפָּה וְכוּ כִּי עָדוֹתֶיךָ נִצְרַתִּי:
 גַּם יִשְׁבוּ שָׂדִים כִּי נִדְּבְרוּ עֲבָדֶיךָ יִשִׁית בְּחֻקֶּיךָ: גַּם
 עָדוֹתֶיךָ שִׁנְעִשִׂי אֲנִשִׁי עֲצוּתִי: דְּבָרֶיךָ לְעִפְר נִפְשִׁי *
 דְּוִי

קיח v. 25. מלע v. 5. קיט v. 5. קיט v. 5. פתח בתחת

11 הַחַיִּים: הַאֲמַנְתִּי כִּי אֲדַבֵּר אֵלַי עֲנִיתִי מֵאֵד: אֲנִי אֲמַרְתִּי
 12 בְּחַפְזִי כָּל-הָאָרֶץ כֹּזֵב: מִדֵּי-אֲשִׁיב לַיהוָה כָּל-תַּגְּמוֹלוֹתַי
 13 עָלַי: בּוֹסֵי-יְשׁוּעוֹת אֲשָׂא וּבִשְׁם יְהוָה אֲקַרָּא: גִּדְרֵי לַיהוָה
 14 אֲשֶׁלֶם נִגְדַדְתִּי לְכָל-עַמּוֹ: יָקָר בְּעֵינֵי יְהוָה הַמְּוֹתֶה
 15 לְחַסְדָּיו: אֲנִי יְהוָה כִּי-אֲנִי עֲבָדֶיךָ אֲנִי עֲבָדֶיךָ בְּדֹאמְתֶךָ
 16 פְּתַח־תִּי לְמוֹסְרֵי: לֵךְ אֲזַבַּח וְכַח הַוֹדֶה וּבִשְׁם יְהוָה אֲקַרָּא:
 18 גִּדְרֵי לַיהוָה אֲשֶׁלֶם נִגְדַדְתִּי לְכָל-עַמּוֹ: בְּהַאֲרוֹת בֵּית
 19 יְהוָה בְּתוֹכִי יְרוּשָׁלַם הַלְלוּיָהּ:

קיז Psal. CXVII. קיז
 א הַלְלוּ אֶת-יְהוָה כָּל-יְנֹנִים שְׂפֹחוּדוֹ כָּל-הָאֲמִים: בִּי וְבַר
 עֲלֵינוּ וְחֲסִדוֹ וְאֲמַת-יְהוָה לְעוֹלָם הַלְלוּיָהּ:

Explanatory notes for this page:

This page shows Psalm 117, verses 21-29 of Psalm 118, and verses 1-24 of Psalm 119.

Hebrew is written and read from right to left.

Double diamonds indicate the end of a verse:

The first 8 verses of Ps 119 begin with the letter Aleph א

Verses 9-16 begin with the letter Beth ב

Verses 17-24 begin with the letter Gimel ג

There are 22 letters in the Hebrew alphabet; thus Psalm 119 has 176 verses 8 x 22 = 176.

The last word in verse 1 is the name for God pronounced Jehovah or Yahweh. Note that the letter Waw ו has a dot above it and a T like symbol below it. Because both symbols indicate vowel sounds, inexperienced readers are confused. Ancient rabbis purposely did this as they thought God's name was too holy for anyone to utter.