

“God’s Law Sustains”

Lesson Text: Psalm 19:7-14

Background Scripture: Psalm 19:1-14

Devotional Reading: Jeremiah 31:31-37

Psalm 19:7–14

⁷ 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. 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. ¹² But who can discern their own errors? Forgive my hidden faults. ¹³ Keep your servant also from willful sins; may they not rule over me. Then I will be blameless, innocent of great transgression. ¹⁴ May these words of my mouth and this meditation of my heart be pleasing in your sight, Lord, my Rock and my Redeemer.

LESSON AIMS

- **Facts:** to show the supremacy of God’s Word in His sustaining us.
- **Principle:** to demonstrate that God’s law was given to us by Him to sustain us.
- **Application:** to show that when we abide by the law of God, we will be revived.

INTRODUCTION

The Curse of Lawlessness

Any ordered society needs rules that guide public behavior. Because we always have rule breakers among us, we need laws and police to enforce them. Enforcement requires judges and penalties, and so a legal system is born. The best societies, however, are ones in which the enforcement of laws is seen as a personal responsibility rather than a police task. The citizenry follows the law, even when there is no possibility of police detection or prosecution.

In a lawless society, rules are spurned and disregarded by individuals. If this becomes too widespread, the result is either chaos or the imposition of a draconian police state. The answer is not really to have more laws and law enforcers. The ultimate and only answer is to have people with the integrity to strive to obey the laws without the threat of a watching police officer.

A problem in all of this, however, is that human laws are always imperfect and may favor one citizen at the expense of another. A notorious example in the history of the United States is the Fugitive Slave Act of 1850. It required people who detested slavery to assist in the tracking down and capturing of runaway slaves. This law perpetuated injustice on several levels and contributed to the societal breakdown of America’s Civil War.

In the Old Testament, Israel was privileged to be both the people of God and the people of God’s laws. They had a legal code to regulate their religion and society, but it was more than the product of the best legal minds and traditions of their day. It was God’s law, delivered to Israel through God’s chosen representatives. It was perfect, for it gave humans guidance from the Creator on how humans should live. It has been referred to as an “owner’s manual,” written by the great designer.

From this perspective, then, lawlessness is more than a inclination to break the rules of a society. It is a disregard for the expressed and intended will of God in the realm of human behavior. This understanding of the relationship between God, God’s laws, and human beings is at the heart of today’s lesson.

LESSON BACKGROUND

Time: anywhere from 1030 B.C. to 971 B.C. **Place:** Judah

Hebrew poetry is unlike traditional English poetry. Whereas we are accustomed to poetry that uses rhyme, rhythm, alliteration, and repetitive structure, the poetry we find in Psalms relies more on a balance of ideas and repetition of thoughts. We call this feature of Hebrew poetry parallelism. It is important to recognize this parallel arrangement when we read the Bible. If we do not, we may not recognize that two lines of poetry are saying the same thing. Instead, we may think there are two points being made and impose an incorrect interpretation on the text. Our lesson today looks at the last half of Psalm 19, which features several good examples of parallelism.

The superscription of Psalm 19 presents this work as a composition of David “to the chief Musician.” This could mean that the psalm was originally a private composition of King David that eventually became a resource to be used in public worship. It begins with the same theme as last week’s psalm (Psalm 8) in extolling the wonders of God’s creation. The theme of Psalm 19:1–6, just before today’s lesson text, is the witness that is given to God’s glory through the beauty of the heavens and the earth. Its sense of the verbal proclamation of creation reminds us of God speaking creation into existence as portrayed in Genesis 1.

In the last half of the psalm (today’s text), this verbal aspect of God’s creative powers is directed toward the divine laws given to the people of God. As God’s creation is beautiful and perfect, so are His laws.

QUALITIES OF THE LAW OF THE LORD (Psalm 19:7-10)

(Psalm 19:1-3, prior to lesson text) Psalm 19 says that both creation and God's Word tell us about God. The first three verses inform us that the heavens declare God's glory and the firmament shows His creative handiwork. Every day and every night conveys this message to mankind all over the world, for there is no language anywhere that is not included in receiving what the heavens say about God. An additional detail is the movement of the sun in those heavens. No place on earth is hidden from its message.

Romans 1:18-20 explains even further: *“¹⁸ The wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all the godlessness and wickedness of people, who suppress the truth by their wickedness, ¹⁹ since what may be known about God is plain to them, because God has made it plain to them. ²⁰ For since the creation of the world God’s invisible qualities—his eternal power and divine nature—have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that people are without excuse.”*

1. How does Psalm 19 explain that the world should be aware of God even apart from His Word?

God’s glory is not limited in the Heavens, however. In order to give us a more complete revelation, God has also given us His Word. That is what the last half of Psalm 19 explains. Not only does God's Word complete His revelation of Himself, but it also has a practical, beneficial result for us. Verses 7-8 explain this in a series of parallel thoughts. Each of the four phrases has a specific term for God's Word, a descriptive adjective defining it, and a resulting positive effect.

The terms referring to God's Word are "law," "testimony," "statutes," and "commandment." Originally the term "law" referred to the Mosaic Law that we find in the Pentateuch. By the time of David, however, it had a broader meaning due to the fact that more Scriptures had been penned by then. These would have included books like Joshua. The term "testimony" speaks of those words that specifically testify of God—His reality and presence as well as His will and ways and how we can best please Him.

"Statutes" are mandates, official commands or instructions that come from one in authority. The word "commandment" speaks for itself and simply adds to what we know as "statutes." That fact allows us to view these terms as synonymous, all refer ring basically to the same thing-God's Word. It will also be accurate, then, to view the adjectives as parallels. Though not synonymous, they all describe the same Word of God.

2. What four terms are used to refer to God's Word and what does each mean? (vs. 7-8)

The four descriptive adjectives are "perfect," "sure," "right," and "pure." That which is perfect is complete, without anything within itself to cause question regarding its integrity. God's Word is without blemish or spot and is completely undefiled. It is also "sure," meaning it cannot be doubted or disputed by anything outside of itself. It is permanently faithful and trustworthy for all who read and study it.

That something is "right" means it is straight, either literally or figuratively. The Word of God is accurate and consistent with itself, meaning there is nothing within it that could possibly lead us astray or onto crooked ways. It is, therefore, also "pure." Never will God's Word send mixed messages.

These descriptive terms set the Lord's law apart from any human creation. It needs no adjustment for changing times. It shares a quality of eternity with its Creator.

3. What four terms describe His Word, and what do they mean? (vs. 7-8)

Finally, each of the four descriptive terms is followed by a result. These are converting the soul, making wise the simple, rejoicing the heart, and enlightening the eyes. These reveal the remarkable power available to those who follow God's will as revealed in His Scriptures. They will find inspiration, wisdom, joy, and clarity. They need not live an existence of depression, foolishness, sadness, and ignorance. God's law is for their benefit.

4. How do we benefit from His Word? (vs. 7-8)

There has been much discussion about the meaning of fearing the Lord. There seem to be two legitimate thoughts regarding this subject, and neither should be ignored. We often hear that the basic idea is to have deep respect for Him—the kind of submissive respect that exalts and honors Him properly. After all, we do not need to be afraid of God in the same way we are afraid of physical circumstances that threaten us unless we are His enemies, those who reject and resist Him.

Perhaps this can be illustrated by Psalm 34:7-11: "⁷ *The angel of the Lord encamps around those who fear him, and he delivers them.* ⁸ *Taste and see that the Lord is good; blessed is the one who takes refuge in him.* ⁹ *Fear the Lord, you his holy people, for those who fear him lack nothing.* ¹⁰ *The lions may grow weak and hungry, but those who seek the Lord lack no good thing.* ¹¹ *Come, my children, listen to me; I will teach you the fear of the Lord.*" Those who "fear" God are promised protection and provision from Him.

There is, however, legitimacy in being afraid of God. Believers who declare to be His children but consistently live in sin need to recognize God's willingness to discipline. The very fact that Psalm 19:9 refers to God's Word as "judgments" conveys the idea that He issues verdicts, for this speaks of decisions made by a judge. In the Bible we see God passing judgment on nations and individuals. That ought to be an incentive for obedience, because these judgments are always true and righteous.

5. What does it mean to fear the Lord? (v. 9)

These qualities make the Word of God a desirable commodity for everyone. Two comparisons are used to explain how valuable it is to us. The first is fine gold, the kind that is free of all imperfections. While the gold is extremely valuable in what it can do for anyone who possesses it, the Word of God is of greater value. Gold does not teach a person how to live, but God's Word does (compare Psalm 119:127).

The second comparison is the sweetness of honey right out of the comb. Any person who has tasted honey that way knows how delectable it is and how it somehow seems even sweeter than that which comes from a jar. Is the Word of God that desirable and enjoyable to you?

Since we live in a world that is filled with confusion and uncertainty, it is encouraging to know that we have a reliable voice of authority. Those who understand that the Bible is God's Word have a source of stability and guidance that cannot be found elsewhere. "¹⁶ *All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness,* ¹⁷ *so that the servant of God^a may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.*" (2 Tim. 3:16-17).

6. To what two physical things is God's Word (law) compared? (v. 10)

APPLICATION OF THE LAW OF THE LORD (Psalm 19:11-14)

The Bible is not meant to be intimidating to us but encouraging. When we consider it as a whole, there seems to be more than we can handle when it comes to pleasing God. But when we see it as being filled with many teachings and can view them one at a time, we realize that we can learn and apply it to our lives. Another contrast appears here, that of warning and rewards. The warnings are there to help keep us on the godly pathway that leads to rewards.

Charles Spurgeon, in *The Treasury of David* (Zondervan), noted that "we are warned by the Word both of our duty, our danger, and our remedy. On the sea of life there would be many more wrecks, if it were not for the divine storm-signals which give to the watchful a timely warning." This reaffirms the value of God's Word as stated in the previous verses. That which keeps us off paths of destruction and leads to pleasing God and being rewarded by Him is of immeasurable worth.

Spurgeon also wrote, "Alas, that so few men will take the warning so graciously given; none but servants of God will do so, for they alone regard their Master's will. Servants of God not only find his service delightful in itself, but they receive good recompense." The Bible Knowledge Commentary says, "The Law -was not a burden to believers who were trying to please God with their lives. For David, keeping God's statutes, which warned him of the dangers of folly and sin, brought reward" (Walvoord and Zuck, eds., Cook).

7. Why does God's Word contain so much warning for us? (v. 11)

David asked a pointed question: Who is able to discern his own shortcomings? The implication appears to be that none of us are capable of understanding the way we live; apart from the Word of God. Jeremiah 17:9 tells us that "*The heart is deceitful above all things and beyond cure. Who can understand it?*" God follows the question with the answer: "*I the Lord search the heart and examine the mind, to reward each person according to their conduct, according to what their deeds deserve.*" (v. 10). We need the Word to show us when and how we sin.

If we are sincerely honest about letting the Word of God expose our spiritual weaknesses, we will be willing to pray, like David, "*Forgive my hidden faults.*" (Ps. 19:12). God will respond to this request by taking us to places in His Word that speak directly about the things He sees in our lives that are displeasing to Him. Perhaps the biggest weakness among believers today, however, is a willingness to hear the Bible taught and preached without an accompanying willingness to change and conform to what it tells us.

We too like David, must recognize the value of hearing God's Word and then allowing it to change us. It was quite a while after his sin with Bathsheba and Uriah, until David heard what Nathan said and then repented (2 Sam. 12:13). We must be willing to respond to God's Word that way.

8. How do we know that we cannot understand our own ways apart from the use of God's Word? (v. 12).

One of the things that often hinders the people of God from spiritual growth is sinful habits. Presumptuous sins are those done willfully in spite of our knowing they are wrong. The Hebrew word that has been translated "presumptuous" means "arrogant." This word derives from a root word that refers to insolence. The American Heritage Dictionary defines "insolent" as "presumptuous and insulting in manner or speech; arrogant." That describes willful sinning.

David recognized that habits can dominate our lives. He did not want anything displeasing to God to have dominion over him, for that would keep him from being pure in God's eyes. That, in turn, would keep him from being upright, or blameless, before God. If he was not upright, neither would he be innocent, or clean, to God. It was his sincere desire to be able to stand before God completely acceptable. David is a challenge to us to willingly face both secret and presumptuous sins and deal with them.

David well knows that certain types of sin may exert a powerful sway over people. He describes this influence as dominion. We are wise to recognize that the devil may have strongholds of sin in our lives (see 2 Corinthians 10:4). Modern psychology may label such things as pathologies or addictions. We might tag someone as a “pathological liar,” a “sex addict,” or as “incurably greedy.” But these are more than psychological disorders. We should recognize that while the law helps us understand these ungodly and destructive sin patterns, we need God’s assistance in breaking down these strongholds. We pray that we will not let sin have dominion over us (Romans 6:14).

David knew that if he dealt with his presumptuous sins, he would be acquitted of serious transgression. Once again we see that he was referring to those things done willfully even in the face of knowing they are wrong. Maybe we should take a hard look at the habits or habitual practices in our own lives that would fall under this description. Do we claim to be children of God and yet participate in activities that are wrong? Once we are informed as to what constitutes sinful behavior in the eyes of God, what excuse do we have for continuing such behavior?

What are presumptuous sins and how do we deal with them? (v. 13)

How fittingly verse 14 completes the expressions of David's desire in Psalm 19! This is a prayer for purity inside and out. It is possible for us to have words coming from our mouths that communicate spiritual truth and yet to harbor thoughts that are far from holy. Upon what do we meditate? Meditation is often compared to a cow chewing her cud, rolling it over and over in her mouth as she prepares it for assimilation. Not only are words important to God; so too are those things we roll over and over in our minds.

David's prayer was that everything be acceptable to God, that is, delightful to Him. "Only the Word of God applied by the Spirit of God could make his mouth and heart so pleasing before God's all-knowing gaze" (Anders, gen. ed., Holman Old Testament Commentary, Broadman and Holman). Since we are imperfect beings— and will be so until we see Jesus—this is a valid prayer for every one of us.

David was addressing God, his Rock and his Redeemer. God was his strength and his source of freedom from the bondage of sin. We can trust confidently in Him as our final voice of authority!

10. Why is David's closing prayer applicable for all of us? (v. 14)

PRACTICAL POINTS

1. Wise living flows from our knowledge of and commitment to God’s Word (Psalm 19:7).
2. Our joy in life is directly related to our exposure to God’s Word (v. 8).
3. Because God’s Word endures forever, it is always completely dependable (v. 9).
4. Earthly treasures bring temporary wealth; following God’s Word brings eternal rewards (vs. 10-11).
5. To stray from Scripture is to abandon God’s means of protecting us from sin (vs. 12-13).
6. Only when in humble submission to Him will our efforts be pleasing to God (v. 14).

CONCLUSION

A Religion of Rules?

What is the Christian to do with the Old Testament law? Moses Maimonides, the medieval Jewish rabbi, counted 613 separate commandments in the laws of Moses. Maimonides catalogued these laws in two divisions. One set consisted of the negative, “thou shalt not” directives. Maimonides listed 365 of these, significant for him because it is the number of days in a solar year. The other set consisted of the positive, “thou shalt” directives. Maimonides found 248 of these and linked them to the segments in the human body.

Every commandment on Maimonides’s list can be found in the Old Testament, but we certainly ignore a lot of them today. For example, #606 is the instruction to provide each soldier with a shovel in order to dig a latrine (Deuteronomy 23:13). Commandment #221 forbids those taking a Nazarite vow to eat raisins

(Numbers 6:3). Commandment #69 forbids men to shave their beards (Leviticus 19:27). These and many others are seen as either irrelevant or nonbinding to the Christian.

But we don't want to toss out the figurative baby with the bathwater! The church must work hard to understand the value of the Old Testament law and its application for us today. The gospel frees us from the tyranny of the law and its hopelessness (Romans 8:2; Colossians 2:14). No one in training is successful if the coach offers nothing but criticism. The law tends to highlight our flaws and weaknesses, whereas the gospel allows us to transcend sin and live for the Lord without dread.

This does not mean we have no more rules. Paul described his own duty to the law of Christ (1 Corinthians 9:21), meaning Paul still had high moral expectations for his own lifestyle. Freedom from the law is not a license to sin. It is a move from service motivated by dread to service motivated by love. The psalmist understands this when he exclaims "*O how I love your law!*" (Psalm 119:97).

Christianity, at its core, is not a religion of rule-keeping. In fact, the central message of the gospel is that keeping rules will never earn salvation. We just cannot obey all the rules all the time, whether there be 613 of them (per Maimonides), or 10 (Exodus 20:2–17), or just 2 (Matthew 22:36–40). It is by God's grace that we are able to get back up again when we fall.

So let us think about those things that are true, honest, just, pure, lovely, and of good report (Philippians 4:8). David's description of the law of the Lord in Psalm 19 meets all of these criteria. We would do well to ponder God's law in all of its beauty and glory.

PRAYER

Heavenly Father, Creator of the entire universe, You have revealed Your will to us through Your Holy Scriptures. In them we may learn Your rules for serving You. O God, may You continue to be our strength as we seek daily to live according to Your will. We pray this in the name of the one who kept Your law perfectly, Jesus. Amen.

THOUGHT TO REMEMBER

Honor God's law.