

Psalm 119
(Part 3)

10/6/2024

We begin this morning by looking at a question that is asked in the gospel accounts of Matthew, Mark and Luke. In Matthew and Mark this question is asked of Jesus by the leaders of Israel. In Luke the question is asked of a leader in Israel by Jesus. Note* Luke's account is likely to be a different scene/time from that spoken of in Matthew and Mark. In all 3 accounts however the answer is the same. The following is from Mark's account -

Mark 12:28-34

“One of the teachers of the law came and heard them debating. Noticing that Jesus had given them a good answer, he asked him, “Of all the commandments, which is the most important?”

“The most important one,” answered Jesus, “is this: ‘Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.’ The second is this: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’ There is no commandment greater than these.”

“Well said, teacher,” the man replied. “You are right in saying that God is one and there is no other but him. To love him with all your heart, with all your understanding and with all your strength, and to love your neighbor as yourself is more important than all burnt offerings and sacrifices.”

When Jesus saw that he had answered wisely, he said to him, “You are not far from the kingdom of God.” And from then on no one dared ask him any more questions.”

The first part of the answer given in this account comes from Deuteronomy 6 and the second part from Leviticus 19. The first part is about our relationship with God and the second part is about our relationship with our fellow mankind (our neighbor).

This is also the order of things listed in The Ten Commandments. Commandments 1-4 speak of our intended relationship with God, and commandments 5-10 about our intended relationship with of fellow mankind. This should be basic knowledge to those who follow God's Word. It is about loving both God and mankind, those created by God in His image.

I use the phrase 'intended relationship above because this is the stated Will of God in His Word. But sin has entered the world and we all fall short of God's intention for us as His created brings.

We started this lesson on Psalm 119 (part 3) by looking at Mark's gospel to point out something said there that also appears here in Psalm 119, and repeated several times in this Psalm - That our love for God involves the heart!

There are 10 Hebrew words and 4 Greek word used in Scripture that translate into English as the words Heart and Hearted and 2 of those Hebrew words appear here in Psalm 119. We will look at these 2 words a little closer in a moment. Of the more than 950 times that the heart is referred to in Scripture, 954 times by my count, almost all of them are referring to some characteristic associated with it and not the physical heart itself.

This is also how we often refer to the heart in everyday language today. We speak of putting our heart into a project. Of being tender hearted. Of lacking heart. Of doing something half hearted. Of giving from the heart, having our heart strings pulled or something that touches our heart etc.

Hebrew words translated as 'Heart' appear 15 times in Psalm 119. And in all but one case it is the Hebrew word *Leb* pronounced *Labe* which refers to one's feelings, will or intellect.

The exception is found in verse 7 where the word Heart is the Hebrew word *Lebab* pronounced *Lay-bawb* which refers to the heart as being the innermost organ.

This Psalm like the rest of God's Word has many levels of depth to it. I would like to draw your attention to one example presented here in this Psalm concerning the heart.

In previous lessons on this Psalm it was pointed out that the Psalm is written in acrostic form. Made up of 22 sections or stanzas, each with 8 verses and laid down in alphabetical order according to the Hebrew language. That this arrangement would make it easier to be remembered by those who read and sang its words.

Notice on the subject of the heart the writer of Psalm 119 uses two Hebrew words in describing the heart in the first stanza. They are *Leb* and *Lebab*. Using the definitions above for these words we might say - using the innermost part of ourselves with our feeling, will, and intellect we should apply these things to the subject matter at hand. Verses 2 and 7 (1st stanza) tells us this will be a blessing to us when we do it with our whole heart. The subject matter spoken of here is seeking and praising God.

But note verse 10 from the second stanza - "*with my whole heart I seek you*". Here we see once again the idea of seeking God with our whole heart. We could say once again God I use all my feelings, will and intellect to seek you from the depths of my heart. But notice what the writer makes recognition of in his very next words - "*let me not wander from your commandments!*".

What does this say about **our** ability to succeed in our quest of seeking and praising God? Consider the following -

Paul in his letter to the Ephesians speaks of himself as being the least of all God's people and yet he was chosen by God to share the gospel. And several times Paul states it is by Grace you have been saved. Speaking there of the Grace of God **which saves us.**

John writes *“This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins.”* Echoing the words of John 3:16.

Perhaps we should take note that Paul, John and the writer of Psalm 119 all recognize that it is God who calls us and not our hearts which begins this process of seeking God . And so to paraphrase what the writer here in Psalm 119 is saying when speaking of the heart and seeking God - Lord I am seeking you from the depths of my heart with all of my feelings, will and intellect but Lord don't let me wander from your commands. You Lord don't let me fail.

Replying to God's call and relying on God's direction for our heart is essential for success in our relationships with God and fellow mankind. Here are two Scriptures which explain why -

*The heart is deceitful above all things,
and desperately sick;
who can understand it?
“I the Lord search the heart
and test the mind,
to give every man according to his ways,
according to the fruit of his deeds.”* (Jeremiah 17:9-10)

*“The Lord saw how great the wickedness of the human race had become on the earth,
and that every inclination of the thoughts of the **human heart** was only evil all the
time.”* (Genesis 6:5)

When mankind walks away from their creator, or concludes they are smarter than God it never turns out well.

This morning let's take note of the things the Psalm writer associates with the heart as we look at the 15 verses in this Psalm which speak of the heart -

Verse

2. *“Blessed are those who keep his testimonies,
who **seek** him with their **whole heart**,”* (Leb = with my feelings, will and intellect)

Here we have a promise of blessing if we do our part.

7. *“I will **praise** you with an **upright heart**, (Lebab = from my innermost part)
when I learn your righteous rules.”*

God's direction 'righteous rules' are to be learned resulting in praise of Him, leading to an upright heart.

10. "With my **whole heart** I seek you; (Leb)
let me not wander from your commandments!"
11. "I have **stored up** your word **in my heart**, (Leb)
that I might not sin against you."
32. "I will run in the way of your commandments
when you **enlarge my heart!**"
34. "Give me understanding, that I may keep your law
and **observe it with my whole heart.**
36. "**Incline** my **heart** to your testimonies,
and not to selfish gain!"
58. "I **entreat** your favor **with all my heart**; (entreat = earnestly ask)
be gracious to me according to your promise.
69. "The insolent smear me with lies,
but with my **whole heart** I **keep** your precepts;
70. "their **heart** is **unfeeling** like fat,
but I delight in your law."
80. "May my **heart** be **blameless** in your statutes,
that I may not be put to shame!"
111. "Your testimonies are my heritage forever,
for they are the **joy** of my **heart.**"
112. "I **incline** my **heart** to perform your statutes (incline = favorably disposed)
forever, to the end."
145. "With my **whole heart** I **cry**; answer me, O Lord!
I will keep your statutes."
161. "Princes persecute me without cause,
but my **heart stands** in awe of your words."

Thus our heart can be used to do or become many things - Seek, praise, store up, enlarge, observe, incline, entreat, keep, blameless, enjoy, cry, stand. But our hearts can also become unfeeling.

Both good and evil can come from our hearts, as in the following two examples from Scripture -

Ephesians 4:32 *“Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you.”*

Matthew 19:8 *“He said to them, “Because of your hardness of heart Moses allowed you to divorce your wives, but from the beginning it was not so.”*

The writer of Psalm 119 understood the need to draw upon the commands, statutes, precepts, Law and decrees of God and to have reverence (fear) of God in order to be successful in all of one's endeavors.

When we couple this lesson on the heart with last week's lesson on turning to God's Law, commands, statutes, precepts, and decrees for guidance, at dawn, all day long, 7 times a day, in the night, through the watches of the night, and at midnight with a reverent fear of God we can have hope in overcoming that which life can throw at us and the sin which so easily entangles.

What is your relationship with your creator this morning? Do you love Him with all your Heart? Do you rely upon His Word, precepts, statutes, decrees, commands and Law for guidance throughout your day and night? God invites all to come to Him. God is not Willing that any should perish.