

Psalm 19:12-14

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We are incapable of fully understanding how flawed and fallen we are. But we can ask God for forgiveness for the mistakes we do not even realize we have made. Further, we ought to ask God to keep us from intentional sins that would enslave us. God is the only true support and savior of humankind.

Nature offers powerful evidence of God's existence and supremacy (verses 1-6). The sacred texts, God's written revelation, disclose intimate details of the Lord's creative eternal nature, unyielding love, constant righteousness, and irrefutable first claims to the human heart's loyalties (verses 7-11).

In this final section, David goes inward. David, a man of unique status who, despite imperfection, is blessed and prospered by God. Now David responds to the unveiled knowledge of the Lord and His ways with introspection and humility in the psalm's final three verses.

Who can discern his errors? The question David poses is rhetorical and directed at every individual who might engage in self-reflection. It implies the negative answer "None can." No human has to be taught how to self-rationalize, we are all born as experts in that sordid craft. David here creates a corollary point; apparently no human is capable of recognizing all their own faults.

Here *discern* in the phrase *discern his errors* (Hebrew "bin") means to recognize the reality of error, fault or sin—both the intentional and unintentional—and to comprehend the full impact of such *errors* on individuals and upon those with whom they interact. In fact, David implies that the propensity of the human being to err, to sin in all dimensions of life—whether knowingly or not—is so pronounced that it is impossible to render a complete account.

Being genuinely self-aware requires recognizing sin's constant encroachment in daily life. *Errors* (from the Hebrew verb "shagah," "to err") is a comprehensive noun describing faults and failures whose outcomes are deviations from the Lord's laws and commands. Thus *Errors*, being violations of God's mandates, are sins. They are departures from the ways God has laid out that lead to our best.

Sinfulness is a trait shared by all humans (Romans 3:23). Thankfully, God so loved the world that He provided for every sin at His own expense (John 3:16; Colossians 2:14).

Acquit me of hidden faults. These violations—*errors*—can be conscious (purposely committed) or unconscious, *hidden* (committed unawares). David, knowing the heart's habitual inclinations to wander away from the Lord, first seeks remedy for the unintended *faults*—the error and sin—that he knows he commits unwittingly. Those that are *hidden*.

The issue at stake is not whether it is merely thoughtlessness, a lack of self-awareness, or utter ignorance that is at the root of the violation. What matters is that God's requirements have been breached by human sin. Only God, from Whom nothing is hidden (Ecclesiastes 12:14; Luke 8:17), can *acquit*—release, forgive, redeem, make void—the sinner's guilt and reset lives after the damage is done. David casts himself on God's mercy, and asks that he be acquitted even of sins of which he is not aware.

What about those *errors*, those sins that are willfully engaged? David asks the Lord for help where David knows that he lacks the fortitude to restrain himself from actively pursuing sin:

Also keep back Your servant from presumptuous sins;

Let them not rule over me.

While again acknowledging that he is the Lord's *servant*, David submits himself to the Lord's active intervention in matters that would otherwise too easily lead David to sinful choices and outcomes. *Keep back Your servant* is not a demand; it is a plea for active, concrete help and restraint. Self-awareness and understanding give David the clarity to know that the human heart is more naturally inclined toward selfish ends and sin (Jeremiah 17:9). He readily concedes that sin has the capacity to *rule over*, to dominate his attentions, affections, and actions. As the Apostle Paul would later lament in the New Testament:

“For what I am doing, I do not understand; for I am not practicing what I would like to do, but I am doing the very thing I hate.”
(Romans 7:15)

We are each called to make a choice. We can either place ourselves in a position that yields to baser things; or, instead, depend upon the Lord for help in escaping our self-serving and sinful tendencies. Those who have received Christ have also received His Spirit, and thus have the capacity to walk in the Spirit, and avoid the deeds of the flesh (Galatians 5:16). It is vital to recognize the reality that we cannot walk apart from sin in our own strength. Thus we need to walk in dependence upon the Spirit. It is important to acknowledge that our flesh is not reformable.

Defeating sin, disclosing a pathway forward away from sin, and redeeming the sinner is God's grace upon humanity (Ephesians 2:8-9).

David is not boasting when he asserts *Then I will be blameless*. His assertion, preceded by the adverb *Then* (Hebrew “az”) refers to God helping him be held *back from presumptuous sins*, that they *not rule over* him.

David recognizes he is a free agent with free will, but he also acknowledges his inability to choose the right way without God's aid. David recognizes that with God's help he can choose to rely on the Lord's assistance to escape the clutches of error and sin.

In making that choice, in following God's lead when confronted by sin and error, David indeed will be *blameless*; found to be without fault, free of being held personally accountable. He will escape the negative consequence of sin (Galatians 6:8).

More than a limited "if-then" proposition, David's challenge and assurance—the same challenge and assurance every person faces when confronted by sin—is a more encompassing "when-then." The Lord is always faithful to provide an avenue of escape from error and sin (Deuteronomy 7:9; 1 Corinthians 10:13). The question to be settled is: Whom will one serve, self or the Lord? This is a vital, ongoing choice, as there are distinct consequences for our choices (Galatians 6:8).

Verse 13 ends by forging an unbreakable connection between the opening mention of *presumptuous sins* and its final words, *great transgression*. The first phrase describes the willfully defiant character of sin that is the consequence of dismissing the Lord's supremacy. Vanity, insolence, pride, insubordination, rebelliousness, selfishness: these are among the attributes that lead one to *presumptuous sins*. David underscores the seriousness of such sin.

Not merely transgression, willful sins of presumption are *great transgression*. The very fact that these violations are willful is as dreadfully consequential as the actual infractions themselves. Willful sin in scripture is accompanied with particularly stern warnings. An example is from Hebrews, which is written to an audience of believing Jews:

"For if we go on sinning willfully after receiving the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins, but a terrifying expectation of judgment and THE FURY OF A FIRE WHICH WILL CONSUME THE ADVERSARIES."
(Hebrews 10:26-27)

Willful sin has a result of judgment fire. God's judgement fire will "consume" God's enemies. That same judgment fire will refine His people. Each judgment will be righteous and true. Paul speaks of the deeds of believers being burned in judgment fire to determine what is refined and remains (1 Corinthians 3:11-17). This Hebrews passage makes clear that willful sin cannot be covered up with religious observance, such as performing temple sacrifices (which was an integral part of Jewish tradition—[see commentary on Hebrews 10:26-31 for further explanation](#)).

The most serious result stemming from choosing sin over the *law of the Lord* is *great transgression* against God. Such *great transgression* is an active form of idolatry that substitutes the authority of oneself for the person and authority of God. David prays to be *acquitted* of guilt, to be found *blameless*, kept from dire self-imposed circumstances whose inevitable outcomes offer only profoundly adverse and eternal implications. David realizes that sin can only be forgiven by God, who is merciful.

In His model prayer, Jesus taught His disciples to pray to be forgiven:

"And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors."
(Matthew 6:12)

Jesus tells His disciples to ask God for forgiveness, in order to maintain fellowship with God. But interestingly the prayer is an inverse of the “Golden Rule” where the petitioner asks God to treat him like he has treated his neighbor. The model prayer request is for God to “forgive as I have forgiven.” The presumption then is that this prayer would prompt the one praying to first forgive prior to asking for forgiveness. This invokes the mercy principle, that God will show mercy to those who have been merciful. David’s petition makes clear that he is leaning on and wholly dependent upon God’s mercy to be forgiven.

The concluding sentence of Psalm 19, verse 14, has been enshrined in literature and loved across languages and cultures for more than two thousand years because of its lyrical beauty, pristine appeal, and devotive power. Here David harnesses both the spirit of the poet and that of Yahweh’s faithful servant to present a prayer of petition seldom elsewhere equaled: *Let the words of my mouth... Be acceptable in Your sight.*

David may speak the words (Hebrew “emer”) but he cedes agency of his speaking to the Lord. In essence, the leading word, a verb, *Let*—to allow, to cause, to enable—asks that the Lord shape, control, and give meaning to the words David utters. Whenever he speaks, whether in common day-to-day conversations or in greater moments of history, David wishes to honor and glorify his Lord. Such speaking by the Lord’s servants, speech prompted and governed by the Lord, will result in God’s wholesome approval.

Rendered as a singular object phrase, *the meditation of my heart* is nevertheless a collective expression gathering together as one entity the many thoughts, emotions, moods, insights, moments of doubt, cries of suffering, sighs of relief, shouts of victory, that course through David’s life-experiences. This second phrase is also tied to the petition that God *let* His approval shape the character of His servant’s *meditation*. David desires only to do that which pleases His Lord and Master.

David’s *heart* (Hebrew “leb”) serves poetically as the seat of his most intimate deliberations, the place where his soul ruminates over and responds to the entirety of the events that transpire in life. There is a dedicated focus David yearns to achieve through this posture of singular *meditation* (Hebrew “higgayon”) that places its greatest value on discerning the Lord’s will and law. David desires that the thoughts upon which he dwells, the plans he considers, and his internal conversations all be pleasing to God. In this, David recognizes again God’s omniscience. God already knows David’s thoughts. David’s prayer is that the thoughts of his heart/mind will be pleasing to God. They will align with God’s law and His will.

The thrust of David’s spiritual and cognitive energies directs his *meditation* toward that sole destination—unyielding love of and faithful obedience to God—where David is confident life, in its fullest expressions, meanings, and experiences will be blessed and prospered (Psalm 1:1-3).

A joyful declaration of worship and gratitude concludes the psalm: *O Lord, my rock and my Redeemer*. To Whom is the poetic prayer and praise of Psalm 19 directed? It is to Yahweh, the Lord; the One Who shapes the infinite and, yet, Who is decidedly intimate.

David is a firsthand witness to the Lord's involvement in people's lives and the circumstances in which they find themselves. What he has seen leads him to the conclusion that the Lord is the sustaining, stable, and solid *rock* upon which to find shelter from life's swirling turmoil. Jesus used this same metaphor when teaching about responding to His words—tantamount to the words of God Himself—as the reliable and unique foundation of solid rock,

“Therefore everyone who hears these words of Mine and acts on them, may be compared to a wise man who built his house on the rock. And the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and slammed against that house; and yet it did not fall, for it had been founded on the rock.”

(Matthew 7:24-25)

Beyond shelter from the storms of life, the Lord is also the *Redeemer*. He moves His people beyond crises into a future laden with purpose and hope (Jeremiah 29:11).

In the earliest years of Israel, a human redeemer was often a relative—or perhaps someone else with a personal interest—who paid off life-crushing debts, releasing the debtor from the penalty of indentured service and ruin. Boaz was a kinsman redeemer for Naomi and her daughter-in-law Ruth (Ruth 4:3-4).

The redeemed had every reason to be overcome by joy and gratitude; to pledge loyalty and life in loyal service to the redeemer. Jesus Christ, Son of God and Son of Man, has long been given the title Redeemer by the Christian church. He is both related to and personally vested in humanity. By His death and resurrection Jesus purchased our debt of sin, setting us free from its enduring penalty—death (Colossians 1:13-14).

By His redemptive act, Jesus offers humankind the gift of eternal life, which is received by faith (John 3:14-16). As a member of God's family, Jesus also offers the believer the opportunity to gain the reward of experiencing eternal life through walking in fellowship with God (1 John 1:3-4). In Jesus Christ we find the fulfillment of the Lord's promised redemption and the embodiment of Who David yearned to serve in faith: *O Lord, my rock and my Redeemer*.

Biblical Text

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13 Also keep back Your servant from presumptuous sins;

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Then I will be blameless,

And I shall be acquitted of great transgression.

14 Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart

Be acceptable in Your sight,

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