

Psalm 19:7-11

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God's commandments are perfect. Those who follow them are made wise, their hearts are glad, their souls are healthy. Through obedience to God, we find great reward.

The second section of Psalm 19 (verses 7-11) moves from considering what can be known about God by observing the created world and surrounding cosmos to a more direct source: God's word. Now God's own testimony, spoken and preserved across multiple generations, is calling readers and hearers—as nations, tribes, communities and individuals—to enter into and maintain an accountable, steadfast relationship with the Lord God of Creation through His revealed word.

Verse 7 invokes the uniquely intimate and personal name of God in Hebrew, “Yahweh,” The One Who Exists, for the first time in Psalm 19. The English translation here renders it, “Lord.” *The law of the Lord is perfect, restoring the soul.* First revealed to Moses in Exodus 3:14, David now repeatedly invokes the sacred personal name of God in verses 7-11 to underscore the origin and authority of the revelatory source. It is all of the Lord God, thus reflecting the Lord's perfectly complete nature and divine attributes.

When narrowly applied within the study of the Hebrew scripture, the term *Law* (Hebrew “Torah”) can be a reference to the Five Books of Moses: Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy. Beyond these, however, the term also became more broadly applied to what was in David's time a growing body of sacred writings. When used in this broader sense the term *law* points to what was by David's time the growing written collection of God's recognized divine revelation. These may have included, among others, writings that ultimately would become the books of Joshua, Judges, early portions of the prophet Samuel's writings, as well as the “Psalm of Moses,” Psalm 90. David likely had this larger view of “torah” in mind when composing Psalm 19. For our current application, it would include the entire Bible.

Those who endeavor to live in harmonious relationship with the Lord by holding to His perfect *law* are themselves restored to fullness and health of *soul*. The Hebrew term for *soul*, “nephesh,” envisions that which is essential to being a whole person: the individual's make-up of body, mind, character and spirit. Unless the human *soul*—the whole person—communes with and receives the perfecting benefits of its Creator, the Lord God, it is inevitably vulnerable to collateral damage caused by the deleterious effects of mortal corruption.

A restored *soul* finds the weighted shackles of mortal corruption and sin loosened. Sin leads to slavery and death, addiction and separation (Romans 6:26). The *law* of God protects, prepares and continuously sets apart the soul; a process of restoration so that the soul—the whole experience and being of an individual person—can be guided toward an ever fuller, ever more bountiful, truly freeing and ultimately immortal fellowship with the Lord. This process of being set apart from the world frees the *soul* to be all God designed us to be, thus bringing us maximum fulfillment (Romans 12:1-2).

David appreciates the multifaceted character of God's self-revelation. Like turning a diamond against the sun to catch a glimpse of its varying prismatic qualities, David looks at and describes the divine self-disclosure from several perspectives other than, but not excluding, *law* ("torah"). *Testimony, precepts, commandment, judgments*: the self-expression of God is far richer than humanity's ability to express itself through the written word, speech, music and song, the visual arts, or any number of academic and scientific disciplines. Moreover, each of God's expressive disclosures have significant outcomes that elevate the lives of those who receive what the Lord offers.

God's self-disclosure as testimony (v. 7b): *The testimony of the Lord is sure, making wise the simple*. The Hebrew word "eduth" aligns closely in meaning with the contemporary English word "testimony" as used in legal proceedings. David's use of *testimony* in building poetic parallels to describe the written words of God is intended to ratify those sacred words through the confirmation of a credible witness to their trustworthiness.

This *testimony* bears witness not only to God, Who is the source of creation and revelation, but also establishes the redeeming work of God's testimonies in people's lives. The *testimonies* of God, as a witness to God's *law*, reflect the character and scope of the Lord's interest, interaction with and benevolence toward His creation, particularly with humanity. These *testimonies* attest to God's supremacy, goodness, holiness, wisdom and relentless loving pursuit of what is best in all things for those who are created so intimately in His image. (For example, see Psalm 145:8-9.)

The first gift given by the Lord's *testimonies* is authentic wisdom. This wisdom is so *sure*, so complete and certain that even the simplest among us is elevated in understanding by embracing these God-given testimonials; we are made *wise* (Hebrew "chakam"). Biblical wisdom speaks of how to live life in a manner that leads to the best possible outcomes. The human soul is limited when lacking this wisdom, left to flounder in a quagmire of self-deception and flawed mortality (Proverbs 18:7). By contrast, the faithful pursuit of the Lord's *testimonies* and the wisdom they impart have great eternal benefit to the human soul as well as great benefit in this life (Proverbs 3:5-6, 2 Corinthians 5:10).

God's disclosure of principles that lead to wisdom are described as *precepts*: *The precepts of the Lord are right, rejoicing the heart*. The Hebrew word rendered *precepts* can also be translated "statutes." Based on the rock-solid moral foundation of "torah" (God's law), the *precepts of the Lord* are principle-driven counsel, rules or codes of behavior given as indispensable guidance for individual and corporate life.

David knows that the Lord's counsel always leads those who follow it to authentically positive outcomes. When the prophet Samuel chided King Saul of Israel for performing his own animal sacrifices in violation of the given guidelines set down by the Lord, the admonition was delivered by way of a precept: "To obey is better than sacrifice" (1 Samuel 15:22). Following God in obedience is what leads to the greatest of rewards, which are rooted in God's approval (1 Corinthians 2:9). A loving human parent approves those things that are for the best of their children. How much more our benevolent Creator who describes Himself as our Father?

Perhaps life's journey will be rugged, but the Lord's *precepts* have been shaped by God's unyielding love and ultimately will lift the heart to *rejoicing*. The term "rejoice" bespeaks a personal experience of profoundest, unshakable peace; an abiding sense of joy despite difficult circumstances, finding its origin in God's unbroken faithfulness. It is a depth of joy that cannot be sullied nor stolen by life's cruel blows. The heart that is "rejoiced" by God will be shepherded even through calamity to "green pastures" and "quiet waters" (Psalm 23:2). Note that David is saying it is God's initiative that causes the heart to rejoice, to enter into this experience of profoundest peace and joy. *Rejoicing* is not the achievement of human will or effort; it is the uniquely lifting, loving gift of God.

God's self-disclosure is also described as *commandment*: *The commandment of the Lord is pure, enlightening the eyes*. In an existence where much is debated between "ought to" and "should do," the Lord has provided "must do's" to accomplish His purposes and clarify humankind's responsibilities related to those purposes. There is no room for uncertainty of thought nor timidity of action where the Lord ordains His commandment (Hebrew "mitsvah"). Since God is our creator, our fulfillment as humans will only come through fulfilling the purpose for which we were made. The *commandment of the Lord* shows us the way, the path, that leads to our true self-interest.

The commandment of the Lord is pure. In the New Testament, James describes the purity of God, "with whom there is no variation, or shifting shadow" (James 1:17). The Lord's commandment is originated in God's own purity. There will be no element within the *commandment of the Lord* that dilutes its vital purpose, compromises its integrity nor corrupts its perfect nature. *The commandment of the Lord* is clean, pristine, *pure* (Hebrew "bar") in every religious, moral, ethical, interpersonal, and pragmatic application. His commands always lead us to our true self-interest. They are always truly for our best; that never varies.

The commandment of the Lord is pure, enlightening the eyes. Jesus famously emphasizes the greatest of the Lord's commandments by referring to Deuteronomy 6:5 as the greatest command, to love God with all our heart and self, and Leviticus 19:18, to love our neighbor as ourselves (Matthew 22:36-40; Mark 12:28-31). Love of God, love of neighbor: these are non-negotiables for God's people. It is the love of God that brought about His commandments for the purpose of *enlightening the eyes*. Under God's rule and in obedience to His *commandment* we gain unimpeachable insight and understanding—enlightenment—helping us respond to God, creation and others with redeeming authentic love (1 John 4:19).

Just before his death on Calvary, Jesus issued the all-encompassing command to His followers, "love one another, even as I have loved you" (John 13:34). The common strata running throughout the commandments of the Lord, in both Old and New Testaments, is love. The love of God—which is inseparable from the foundation of His commandments—have a clarifying, cleansing impact on the often self-muddling relationships individuals pursue with the Lord, with themselves, and with others.

The love of God—the "why" of creation and redemption—brings wholesome life and light where before only confusion and darkness prevailed. 2 Samuel records David's song of praise to

God upon being delivered from the murderous hands of King Saul and others: “For You are my lamp, O Lord; And the Lord illumines my darkness” (2 Samuel 22:29).

[\[For more on this, see the article, “The Ten Commandments Restated,” in the commentary on Deuteronomy 5 for an excellent summary discussion regarding the most-recognized collection of the Lord’s .\]](#)

The beginning of wisdom is the fear of the Lord, which leads us to follow His Law, which is in our true best interest: *The fear of the Lord is clean, enduring forever*. Where the law (Hebrew “torah”) speaks, the Lord (Hebrew “Yahweh”) speaks. In this regard, one is not distinct from the other. By use of a poetic stratagem that uses a synonym—here “Lord” is equated with “law”—to convey the unity of the Lord and His law, David points to the immortal character of God’s being and the like-endurance of God’s law. During his ministry on earth Jesus described the necessary and purposeful endurance of God’s law:

“For truly I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not the smallest letter or stroke shall pass from the Law until all is accomplished.”
(Matthew 5:18)

God’s word is given to us as written words, and words are a means by which humans transmit knowledge. Jesus Christ, as God Himself, is the Word made flesh (John 1:1,14).

The fear of the Lord is clean, enduring forever. The term *fear* generally alludes to a situation where we have concern over the prospect of an adverse consequence we would prefer to avoid. When God gave the Ten Commandments to Israel, the people asked God to speak through Moses, lest they hear God speak and die (Exodus 20:19). In this circumstance, the people feared death, and sought to avoid it. Interestingly, God replied that they should not fear physical death as much as they should fear sinning against God, breaking His commandments (Exodus 20:20).

When we *fear the Lord*, we recognize that breaking His *statutes* creates the worst of adverse consequences for our lives. We recognize that breaking God’s commands leads us to being polluted, soiled, marred, disfigured from what God made us to be. Contrasting this life led in sin, *the fear of the Lord is clean* or pure. The consequences of sin is addiction/slavery to harsh masters who destroy (Romans 1:22,24,26, 6:16). Walking in sin eventually leads to loss of self (Romans 1:26). But walking in God’s ways leads to our greatest fulfillment. It leads us to possess the reward of our inheritance (Colossians 3:23; Philippians 2:5-11).

When we approach God’s word, there is no need to “spit out the sticks” as we “eat the hay.” There are no elements of God’s direction for us that are not for our best; it is completely *pure/clean*. Our great *fear* should be that we stray from God’s ways, because that is the path of destruction and loss (Romans 6:23). We also do not have to adjust God’s word as times change. God is the eternal fountainhead of *enduring*, never ceasing nor diminishing love, holiness, and purity. His word does not change, and His ways transcend times and epochs (Hebrews 13:8).

David rounds out his poetic enumeration of the aspects of the written self-disclosures of God with a marvelously balanced phrase: *The judgments of the Lord are true*. The center point, the

fulcrum of the balance, is Yahweh, *the Lord*. Extending in perfectly maintained equilibrium from Yahweh/*the Lord* are His *judgments* (Hebrew “mishpat”) on one side and their character of being *true* on the other.

The judgments of the Lord are true (Hebrew “emeth”). “Emeth” is also translated as “right” and “faithful.” We can depend on God to judge in a manner that is both consistent and right. He never makes mistakes. When God judges, His judgement is the correct statement, assessment, or verdict.

The term *judgments* is intended as a positive descriptor. Modern readers might misunderstand this term to mean castigation or condemnation, but here *judgments* refers to ideas of decisions, findings, or authoritative statements. The Word of the Lord is conclusive; it does not leave us without clarity. It is not incorrect sometimes. His *judgments* are always right and *true*.

Extending from Yahweh’s own character, His *judgments* are also *true*. Reliable, verifiable, trustworthy, wholesome, correct, appropriate, indisputable: all these serve to define what David means by *true*. There is, however, more to what is *true* about the Lord’s *judgments*. As it is with Yahweh’s own nature, the truth of his *judgments* is also permeated with His own love and kindness (Psalm 107:1; Psalm 136:1).

David’s final phrase in verse 9 is a summarizing echo of the previous phrase regarding God’s *judgments: they are righteous altogether*. There is no fault in any part of Yahweh’s *judgments*. The Hebrew word for righteousness, “tsadeq,” is unequivocal in its meaning: it is untainted justice, unyielding uprightness. It conveys moral, ethical and relational purity. It is the fertile soil in which authentic, enduring godly love flourishes. It is harmony between Creator and created. It is things operating according to their true design.

Verse 10 puts a last deft stroke of poetic artistry to the praise of God’s multifaceted revealed commandments for living. *They are more desirable than gold*. Humans desire *gold* because they deem that the purchasing power of *gold* can enhance and elevate their lives. But the wisdom of God given through His commands are *more desirable than gold* for enhancing our life experience while living on this earth. His commands show us the way to live a life of spiritual abundance, regardless of physical circumstance.

That which we consider precious, *gold*, cannot compare to the inherent value of God’s sacred writings. As Paul asserted:

“All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; so that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work.”

(2 Timothy 3:16)

God’s written word shows us, trains us to be equipped for the work God appointed us to while living this life. It is through accomplishing this work that we reach our greatest satisfaction. God appointed each person a specific and unique contribution to make to His kingdom:

“For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them.”
(Ephesians 2:10)

The comparison of quantity and quality of *fine gold* also fails when compared to God’s commands; *yes*, God’s law is more precious *than much fine gold*. There is not enough gold in the world to measure up to the everlasting value of the truth, righteousness, and love that is indigenous to God’s revealed words.

Value is not to be counted solely with concepts of material worth; there is a relational pleasure available to humankind that can only be found in fellowship with its Creator. To walk in God’s ways is *Sweeter also than honey and the drippings of the honeycomb*. David likens living in harmony with the Lord’s law to the known, even if rare, luxury of a deeply pleasing and satisfying sensory experience. The rich viscosity of honey drippings, overflowing and melting down from the honeycomb, brings with it a full play of sweetness in taste and aroma, as well as a unique tactile sensation. As such sweetness dominates the senses, so the sweetness of God’s law overtakes and, with eternal benefit, carries those who embrace it.

David, an excellent communicator, completes the second section of Psalm 19 with a word for those who are not necessarily given to poetic sympathies. In verse 11, David is straightforward about an important conclusion to take away from the figurative language of the previous verses regarding the laws of the Lord: *Moreover, by them Your servant is warned*. The word *servant* (Hebrew “ebed”) is to be applied to the one who belongs to and has responsibility to God. When people enter into covenant relationship with God, they have accountability to live under *the law of the Lord*. The term translated *servant* can be variously translated as servant, bondsman, bond-servant, subordinate-subject, follower, or worshipper.

How does this conform with the New Testament insistence that believers in Jesus are no longer under the law? (Romans 3:21; Galatians 5:18). This reality does not overturn the immense value of God’s law (Romans 7:7,13). The New Testament principle transcends the rules, and reaches to the very spirit behind them. As Paul stated:

“...so that the requirement of the Law might be fulfilled in us, who do not walk according to the flesh but according to the Spirit.”
(Romans 8:4)

And again:

“For you were called to freedom, brethren; only do not turn your freedom into an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another. For the whole Law is fulfilled in one word, in the statement, “YOU SHALL LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF.”
(Galatians 5:14-15)

When New Testament believers walk in the way of the Spirit, they fulfill the purpose for which God’s law was given, namely to point each person to the path that is best for themselves as well as for all whom they touch.

The *servant* of God that is *warned* by God's word is any person who is in the family of God. The New Testament uses the term servant to refer to those who have believed upon Jesus and been born anew of the Spirit (John 3:5;14-16; 1 Peter 2:16; Revelation 1:1). Believers in Christ have the immense privilege of hearing the voice of Jesus, and entering into intimate fellowship with Him in order to learn of His ways, and gain the greatest of treasures (Revelation 3:18-21).

The servant *is warned*; this demonstrates the revealing, transparent intent of the Lord's divine law to offer correction against behavior that is destructive. The law will lead us to behavior that is beneficial. This warning is much like instructions for equipment designed to safely ease difficult labor. Used within its designed parameters, the equipment facilitates the task. If the stated safety cautions are not heeded, however, great harm can follow.

The whole of Psalm 19 speaks of God's law, statutes, commandments, and judgments. These are not words we typically associate with the sweetness of honey. Correction, reproof, instruction: these are all words we typically associate with a bitter taste. But sweetness is exactly how David describes God's direction.

Why? God's words warn us how to avoid harm. Not only that, God's direction and instruction shows us how to live constructively. It brings us the greatest of rewards.

The Lord's servants are provided specific guidelines, directives, and guardrails detailing the expectations under which they live, worship, and relate to each other and to God. Ethical boundaries, moral requirements, relational conventions are made readily apparent to God's people through God's word.

We need God's word in order to actually discern what is for our best. There is a strange reality about humans—we typically do not know what we actually want. We need direction. We may think we know. We might think that a few more dollars in the bank account or a few more followers on Instagram will meet a desire of our heart. But "more" is an unachievable destination. Sometimes we have specific goals we believe will bring us happiness. But all too often, those who receive the very things they were so sure they wanted discover it only leads to emptiness.

We live in a world that chases *gold* and *honey*, but doesn't realize the infinite supply of something vastly superior to either. God's word provides spiritual treasure in abundance and is readily available for us through following God's ways, as outlined in His word.

The word of God is more precious than *gold* and sweeter than *honey*. It leads us on paths to the fulfillment of our deepest desires.

Throughout Psalm 19, David proves to be optimistically inclined rather than fatalistically resigned. The negative consequences of rejecting the revealed laws of God are at most implied, but not mentioned outright. David concentrates on the positive aspects of taking Yahweh and His laws to heart. To conclude his composition of praise for the Lord's law, testimony, precepts, commandments, and judgments David leaves the reader with a summary statement: *In keeping them there is great reward.*

The Hebrew word “eqeb,” rendered to English as *reward*, specifies consequence or outcome. Given the poetic descriptions in verses 7-10, it is clear that David intends his audience to understand that the ultimate consequence of embracing the Lord and His law will be nothing short of *great reward*. It is a significant miscalculation to limit *reward* to terms of gain in mere wealth or social status. These are things that pass away. Rather, God’s riches are lasting.

Restoration of life to the soul, the imparting of divine wisdom, the heart that is taught to rejoice, the enlightenment accompanying godly understanding: these are far and away of greater worth than anything to be claimed by material gain or accretion of socio-political power. That is because the former are eternal, woven from the pure nature of the Immortal God; the latter are merely chafing rags, paltry threads of what is mortal, destined to corruption, failure, and death.

Biblical Text

⁷ **The law of the Lord is perfect, restoring the soul;
The testimony of the Lord is sure, making wise the simple.**
⁸ **The precepts of the Lord are right, rejoicing the heart;
The commandment of the Lord is pure, enlightening the eyes.**
⁹ **The fear of the Lord is clean, enduring forever;
The judgments of the Lord are true; they are righteous altogether.**
¹⁰ **They are more desirable than gold, yes, than much fine gold;
Sweeter also than honey and the drippings of the honeycomb.**
¹¹ **Moreover, by them Your servant is warned;
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