



The Word Concerning the Word

*Your word is a lamp to my feet
And a light to my path.
I have sworn and I will confirm it,
That I will keep Your righteous ordinances. (Ps. 119:105-106)*

Even if it cannot be remembered where it is located, it is probably safe to say that nearly every Christian can quote the 105th verse of Psalm 119, or at least hum the Amy Grant tune from which they remember it. However, like most of the “famous” verses in the common shared memory and culture of Christians, because they are not studied and understood within the whole context in which they are found—in other words, the verses in the paragraph and sometimes the whole chapter surrounding them, we often end up only espousing part of the truth intended, or in some cases, missing the mark completely. In this case, many Christians seem to think God’s Word is some kind of flashlight which works for our good by simply shining it in front of us and fail to understand the next verse in the sequence, which is an oft-repeated admonition in the whole of Psalm 119: God’s Word has to be put into practice. Once it illuminates something, we are then responsible for **acting** upon it. Having the light is of no value if we do not behave accordingly.

At the risk of incurring the email wrath of Christians everywhere (my inbox overfloweth), it is my opinion that in the case of this particular verse, the problem **IS** with that Amy Grant song, in combination with the propensity to just quote this one verse from a Psalm comprised of 175 additional verses. That the song accurately quotes the King James rendition of Psalm 119:105 is laudable, but the rest of the lyrics accompanying it, quite frankly, are not. They do not actually teach what Psalm 119 overall repeatedly instructs is the right course of action where God’s Word is concerned.

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When I feel afraid,
And think I've lost my way,
Still, you're there right beside me.
Nothing will I fear
As long as you are near,
Please be near me to the end

Thy word is a lamp unto my feet
And a light unto my path.
Thy word is a lamp unto my feet
And a light unto my path

I will not forget
Your love for me and yet,
My heart forever is wandering
Jesus is my guide,
And hold me to Your side,
And I will love You to the end.

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Neither of the accompanying verses contain the kind of teaching you will find in the whole of Psalm 119, the source of this song's chorus and title. Those poetic additions essentially emphasize feeling near to Jesus, having Him close, and in the last line, even loving Him. No, those are not bad or evil thoughts in and of themselves, but they do not reflect the true meaning of this Psalm dedicated to God's Word, which actually teaches, "When I feel afraid" I will obey God's Word **regardless** of my feelings and **in spite of** my fear. This Psalm does **not** make the request, "...hold me to Your side, and I will love you to the end", but rather that biblical love is proven by obedience to the whole of God's Word and ways to the very end **in spite of** circumstance, or any feeling, and even when we "feel" completely separated and alone from Christ. It may be subtle, but a truth has been lifted from Scripture and dressed up with mismatched accessories so that it is not fully teaching that which God's Word actually intended. Nowhere in this song is there even the notion, when it comes to God's Word, "*I have sworn it and I will confirm it*", much less "*keep*" it. Instead, a sense of nearness to Christ is substituted for a scriptural teaching on obedience in spite of one's feelings. This is actually not something trivial.

In its original context, this snippet of biblical text is about obedience to God's Word regardless of personal feelings, emotion or even in circumstances so overwhelming that we wonder if we will survive them; in the song the crucial element of obedience experiences a substitution with a perceived feeling of closeness and further request to

feel even closer. It undermines the basic biblical teaching of the true definition of “faith”.

Psalms 119 is remarkable in many ways, but not just because it is the longest chapter in the Bible, or that each of the 22 eight verse stanzas begins in succession with a different letter of the Hebrew alphabet, or that it is **the** exhaustive explanation found in God’s Word on God’s Word, but probably more so for how it is so universally ignored by believers. Other than the one verse, who can cite anything else within it? At first glance it appears to be something unnecessarily long, repeating the same material over and over again in order for the poet to accomplish his acrostic scheme to employ all the letters of the alphabet. But this is actually one of the crowning gems of Scripture where we are not only shown **how** God views the overall organization and categorization of Scripture, but provides unambiguous directions as to **what** to personally do with it.

How do you categorize Scripture? Do you see it as consisting of different Testaments, or do you divide it up according to chronology or literary type? To be sure, these and many other similar things are useful and necessary tools in our overall approach to handling God’s Word, but Psalm 119 is the scriptural explanation of **how** it is organized, and it is no coincidence it is the largest chapter in the whole Bible; the Holy Spirit inspired a good faith effort to get our attention and set us on the right path where His Word is concerned by making it the biggest thing out there. It provides the foundational starting point for our understanding of Scripture, and if we do so, those additional tools will greatly benefit from building on this right beginning. It goes hand-in-hand with what is revealed through Paul that we need to begin with a view of Scripture as being a unified whole rather than separate parts which coincidentally came together.

*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 3:16–17*

Notice that this list of what the goal of God’s Word entails is **changed behavior** as a result of putting His Word into practice. This is **exactly** what Psalm 119 greatly expands upon.

This is worthy of a study in its own right, but to provide a minimally brief explanation, the appearance of the repeated use of the same terms over and over is actually eight specific aspects of God’s Word. It is no coincidence that the number “eight” appears so

often, it being the biblical representation of new beginnings. When we accept Christ as our Savior, the Word provides what is necessary for us to pursue this new beginning as we leave the old life, and all of its associated behaviors, behind.

As shown in the chart below, our English translators provide corresponding definitions which are not identical synonyms for the exact, same thing, but reveals how God views and categorizes Scripture. The English terms are backed by separate, corresponding Hebrew terms. This is a useful bookmark to keep handy so as to remind us what each term actually means, each one carrying with it a specific meaning where each aspect of God's Word is concerned.

There are 8 different words used throughout Psalm 119 to describe God's Word. Make sure of their definition each time they are used, & the correct context in which they are employed. These are NOT all synonyms with the same meaning, but each communicate something very specific.

Psalm 119	Commandment ("Mitsvah") Used 22 times	Law ("Torah") Used 25 times	Ordinance/Judgment ("Mishpat") Used 20 times	Precept ("Piqqud") Used 21 times	Statute ("Choq", "Chuqqah") Used 22 times	Testimony ("Edah", "Eduth") Used 22 times	Ways ("Derek", "Orach") Used 7 times	Word ("Dabar", "Imrah") Used 18 times
	Requirements for living in a covenant relationship with God.	"Torah" is not only the name of the Law, but also means "teaching" or "instruction".	What we might call "case law", the application of God's Word in situations not specifically addressed in Scripture word-for-word. 3rd party "yea" or "nay"	From Hebrew word for "inspect". The requirements of God's people AFTER entering a covenant relationship with Him.	Prescribed tasks and boundaries of a permanent nature, such as rules for holy days, sacrifices, limits on marriage, etc.	"Eye witness" testimony. God's personal corroboration of the benefits and/or consequences where His Word is concerned.	Refers to a well-travelled road. The course which God reveals as right & which humans stick to or stray from.	A matter or cause spoken directly by God. Whether a matter in the past or present, it is always continuously active.

Every verse in Scripture belongs to **at least** one of these categories. There is no conflict if a verse or passage belongs to more than one, but at least one is always present. And, yes, this applies to both Testaments, all the books regardless of literary type, and regardless of when in the overall chronology of God's given Word it was provided.

The sharper tools in the shed will intone, "Hey! Wait a minute! You're missing a whole category of Scripture, Bubba!" No, that is one of the key points conveyed by Psalm 119, that there is no separate, standalone category labeled "Prophecy". In reality, whatever a biblical Prophet speaks belongs to one of these categories. He is actually providing a "Testimony" or a "Judgment" or a "Word" or any one of these singularly or in combination. This goes a long way to explaining why there is so much confusion when it comes to understanding the prophetic portions of God's Word because they are so often treated as a separate category with separate rules, when from God's perspective they should not.

But Psalm 119 does not simply begin and end with designating the categories which fundamentally shape the whole counsel of God's Word, but the seeming repetition is actually accompanying instruction as to what, exactly, we are to do with every aspect of God's Word. It is an exhaustive coverage of not just the requirement but the need to put God's Word and ways into practice.

It is an interesting shared behavior among Christians that when faced with almost any personal issue, dilemma or point of contention, that our knee-jerk reaction is to go to the Lord in prayer. Psalm 119 is certainly written in the form of a prayer, but it rarely addressed that action on its own. This is because just engaging in prayer alone is an incomplete action where God is concerned; it is completed by an equal pursuit of God's Word. In fact, this is the human side of that conversation which is devoted to making a personal accounting of what is personally being accomplished where God's Word is concerned. As it has been famously stated, "Prayer is the way we talk to God, but Scripture is the way He talks back to us". But it is very difficult to sincerely study this passage without realizing how little we incorporate God's Word as the key part of any issue's resolution. Far too often we stare into the great expanse waiting for some kind of cosmic, divine response when it is residing in that Book on our desk we seem to rarely open, but won't go to church without.

Persecution & Opposition

One of the most prolific, repeated items is how to properly respond to our mistreatment at the hands of others, and in particular, opposition aimed squarely at our faith. Just look at the following examples, and take special note of the remedy common to each case:

*Even though **princes** sit and talk against me,
Your servant meditates on Your statutes. (Ps. 119:23)*

*May Your lovingkindnesses also come to me, O Lord,
Your salvation according to Your word;
So I will have an answer for **him who reproaches me**.
For I trust in Your word. (Ps. 119:41-42)*

***The arrogant** utterly deride me,
Yet I do not turn aside from Your law.
I have remembered Your ordinances from of old, O Lord,
And comfort myself. (Ps. 119:51-52)*

*The cords of **the wicked** have encircled me,*

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But I have not forgotten Your law. (Ps. 119:61)

***The arrogant** have forged a lie against me;
With all my heart I will observe Your precepts. (Ps. 119:69)*

*May **the arrogant** be ashamed, for they subvert me with a lie;*

But I shall meditate on Your precepts. (Ps. 119:78)

***The arrogant** have dug pits for me,
Men who are not in accord with Your law.
All Your commandments are faithful;
They have persecuted me with a lie; help me!
They almost destroyed me on earth,
But as for me, I did not forsake Your precepts. (Ps. 119:85-87)*

***The wicked** wait for me to destroy me;
I shall diligently consider Your testimonies. (Ps. 119:95)*

*Your commandments make me wiser than **my enemies**,
For they are ever mine. (Ps. 119:98)*

***The wicked** have laid a snare for me,
Yet I have not gone astray from Your precepts. (Ps. 119:110)*

*Depart from me, **evildoers**,
That I may observe the commandments of my God. (Ps. 119:115)*

*Redeem me from **the oppression of man**,
That I may keep Your precepts. (Ps. 119:134)*

*Many are **my persecutors** and **my adversaries**,
Yet I do not turn aside from Your testimonies. (Ps. 119:157)*

***Princes** persecute me without cause,
But my heart stands in awe of Your words. (Ps. 119:161)*

In such situations, are we inclined to run to God's Word and ensure our own, personal compliance? How well do we recognize that the spiritual goals behind these actions from protagonists across the board is to first and foremost derail our personal obedience to God's Word and ways? That is how they invoke a response from us that is most often unloving, un-Christian, and just plain unbiblical. If we stick to acting and behaving in strict accordance with God's Word, we will ***always*** find ourselves on the right path to providing a godly, biblical response empowered by the Holy Spirit rather than resorting to our old, fleshly desire for self-satisfaction.

In Numbers 22-24 is the important story of how the king of Moab tried to purchase the aid of a professional prophet to bring a spiritual and literal downfall to the advancing Israelites, a teaching referred to in the New Testament as well by Peter (2 Pe. 2:10b-16), Jude (Jude 1:10-12) and Christ (Rev. 2:14). Essentially, as long as Israel was in compliance with God's Word, this effort was unsuccessful. However, what turned things around is revealed in Scripture by the disclosure that by the "*counsel of Balaam*", Israel was seduced to "*trespass against the Lord*". (Num. 31:16) When they abandoned their faithfulness to God's Word, their greatest problem was not actually the enemy's intentions and even actions brought against them, but the corruption of their personal relationship with God. As with all the situations offered in Psalm 119, and corroborated by parallel scriptural accounts, the best knee-jerk reaction we can have is to run to God's Word and ensure that we are obedient regardless. The remedy is ***always*** first and foremost faithfulness to God's Word and ways.

Trials, Tribulation & Endurance

Likewise, when undergoing personal tests and trials, it is not prayer alone which proves the quality of our faith, but the degree to which we are obedient to His Word:

*Remember the word to Your servant,
In which You have made me hope.
This is my comfort in my affliction.
That Your word has revived me. (Ps. 119:49-50)*

*My eyes fail with longing for Your word,
While I say, "When will You comfort me?"
Though I have become like a wineskin in the smoke,
I do not forget Your statutes. (Ps. 119:82-83)*

*If Your law had not been my delight,
Then **I would have perished in my affliction.** (Ps. 119:92)*

***I am exceedingly afflicted:**
Revive me, O Lord, according to Your word. (Ps. 119:107)
Look upon my affliction and rescue me,
For I do not forget Your law.
Plead my cause and redeem me;
Revive me according to Your word. (Ps. 119:153-154)*

It is actually the primary action we are to undertake in the pursuit of the oft-encountered related biblical theme of endurance:

*O Lord, I remember Your name in the night,
And keep Your law. (Ps. 119:55)*

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*At midnight I shall rise to give thanks to You
Because of Your righteous ordinances. (Ps. 119:62)*

*My life is continually in my hand,
Yet I do not forget Your law. (Ps. 119:109)*

*I am small and despised,
Yet I do not forget Your precepts. (Ps. 119:141)*

*I rise before dawn and cry for help;
I wait for Your words.
My eyes anticipate the night watches,
That I may meditate on Your word. (Ps. 119: 147-148)*

How often do we pray for encouragement and the ability to endure without simultaneously consulting God's Word? By failing to do so, we are foregoing the comfort of God's response as it is revealed through His written Word, which in turns strengthens our resolve to remain obedient regardless of our personal feelings or the most overwhelming nature of the circumstances.

Additional Issues

The practice of always first returning to God's Word is at the heart of nearly every Christian behavior and situation. It the right response to the Lord's discipline...

*Before I was afflicted I went astray,
But now I keep Your word. (Ps. 119:67)*

*It is good for me that I was afflicted,
That I may learn Your statutes.
The law of Your mouth is better to me
Than thousands of gold and silver pieces. (Ps. 119:71-72)*

It is the right response to abstaining from sin...

*I have restrained my feet from every evil way,
That I may keep Your word.
I have not turned aside from Your ordinances,
For You Yourself have taught me.
How sweet are Your words to my taste!
Yes, sweeter than honey to my mouth!
From Your precepts I get understanding;
Therefore I hate every false way. (Ps. 119:101-104)*

It is the right response to extreme emotional anguish...

*My soul weeps because of grief;
Strengthen me according to Your word. (Ps. 119:28)*

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It is the right response on which to base our proper approach of God...

*Establish Your word to Your servant,
As that which produces reverence for You. (Ps. 119:38)*

It is the right response of our personal praise...

*Seven times a day I praise You,
Because of Your righteous ordinances. (Ps. 119:164)*

It is the foundation for our personal ministry to the Body of Christ...

*I am a companion of all those who fear You,
And of those who keep Your precepts. (Ps. 119:63)*

*May those who fear You turn to me,
Even those who know Your testimonies. (Ps. 119:79)*

It is the foundation for our attitude when it comes to our consideration of the unsaved...

*My eyes shed streams of water,
Because they do not keep Your law. (Ps. 119:136)*

And yes, it is foundational to our prayer life...

*Let my cry come before You, O Lord;
Give me understanding according to Your word.
Let my supplication come before You;
Deliver me according to Your word. (Ps. 119:169-170)*

The repeated point within Psalm 119 is how a believer, in every situation, runs as fast as they can to God's Word, not just to read it, but for the purpose of self-examination. In every scenario, to what degree am I sure that I am first and foremost in compliance with God's Word?

I'm ashamed to say that as a lifelong member of the Church that far too often there has been no pursuit of God's Word in so many situations. This happens when I think that prayer is enough, or fellowship is enough, or talk **about** God's Word is enough in a clinical type of conversation. But the longest chapter of the 929 presented in God's written Word exhaustively refutes the notion that such pursuits are going to be successful without the due diligence of the incorporation of Scripture.

Christians so often pursue activities and courses of action which contain **some** elements of spirituality without full incorporation of God's Word. We have seen how a popular song can be accepted within the Church because it was never formed nor subsequently evaluated against the standard of God's Word. But this happens in very broad strokes in many ministries, movements and relationships.

Simply reading Scripture every day is not enough; it has to become an integral part of every part of our Holy Spirit-filled lives. Without doing so, it is like a deaf person who is still able to talk out loud to someone, but incapable of hearing the response. Likewise are all things for a Christian without the fundamental incorporation of God's Word, with the primary goal of a personal checklist to be obedient regardless.

Many wonder what is wrong with our times, especially **within** the Church proper. I respectfully submit this is what actually needs to be addressed more than anything else where Christians are concerned. A proper return to and implementation of God's Word resolves every issue of sin, false teaching, and ill behavior. The lack of it is why "Christ" so often cannot be seen within a "**Christ**"ian.

In Him,

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