

Loving God's Word

Psalms 119:113-136

When I found this passage during my devotional time I must say the words made me stop and examine myself. I asked myself the following questions and I hope and pray that you might ask similar questions as well. Do I really love the word of God the way that I should? Has the unfolding of His words given me a simple man (Psalms 119:130) an understanding of His glory? Do I thirst for every word that has come out of the mouth of God (Matthew 4:4)? Am I thirsty enough for His word that I am willing to give up the short term pleasure that I get from satisfying the evil desires of my heart (James 1:14)? Do I truly believe that when I completely surrender my will to His that I will receive the unspeakable joy of 1 Peter 1:7-9?

These my friends are tough questions of which for the most part I had to humbly say NO. Truthfully we as Christians do not always allow His word to penetrate the darkest areas of our hearts (Hebrews 4:12) nor do we allow His word to guide our every footstep (Psalms 119:133). In today's sermon I am going to begin by outlining double mindedness as the real reason why we don't love His word the way we should. Then I am going to explain the Psalmist's four steps to faithfully obeying God's word:

- 1). Allegiance Shift 100 % to God
- 2). Pray for protection from the world
- 3). Pray God will Teach one how to Discern His Truth Rightly
- 4). Pray God grants you a genuine thirst to read and obey His word

Double-Mindedness

How should Christians walk? The Bible tells us to walk worthy of our calling (Ephesians 4:1), uprightly (Isaiah 57:2) and in the light (1 John 1:7). Since there are many paths and much opposition, it takes determination and effort to stay on the narrow path of righteousness. The biggest problem we face when trying to stay on this narrow path is our double minded attitude about God. Let me give you an illustration.

Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde. I wonder if we are not like Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde. The fictional character Dr. Henry Jekyll is usually portrayed as a large, stylish doctor of prominent stature in the community. While Dr. Jekyll looks good publically there is a war waging in his mind whether to do evil or good. In a desire to maintain his good reputation Dr. Jekyll tries to keep the evil in his mind from being acted upon by taking a special serum that he developed. Instead of the serum containing his evil desires within his mind, Dr. Jekyll turns into a hideous monster who does all sorts of evil acts without any remorse, hence him being called Mr. Hyde. One night, after having violently killed Sir Danvers Carew, he decided to stop these hideous transformations by doing philanthropic work. Believing he had become a good person he looked down at his hands and they were the hands of Mr. Hyde. He had transformed after having taken the serum. Knowing that it was only a matter of time before he permanently became Mr. Hyde, Dr. Jekyll commits suicide so that his evil side may never be released again. – Source: Wikipedia

Double Minded Christians? While the above character is fictional, the concept of a double-minded Christian certainly is not. Double-minded means holding onto two contrary opinions at the same time. When Elijah was on Mount Carmel he asked the children of Israel whom would they follow: Jehovah or Baal. He asks them: "How long will you waver between two opinions? If the Lord is God, follow Him; but if Baal is God, follow him" (1 Kings 18:21). Double minded Christians are ones that are born again believers but are not fully determined to follow God. James Montgomery Boice states: Christians want the benefits of believing, but they want their sin too." Truthfully we have become lukewarm. With one foot in God's kingdom and one in Satan's kingdom we believe we can effectively serve our Creator. Don't we as Christians hold onto conflicting thoughts at the same time? For instance, Scripture says to love one another (John 13:34) but which one of us does not have at least one person we do not like? Scripture says to keep the marriage bed pure (Hebrews 13:4) but who here cannot think of a person that you admire their body? Scripture says to not covet (Exodus 20:17) but who here when the Lotto commercial comes onto our TV does not dream of being rich? Truthfully, we want our lives to be fluid, holding onto the opinion that best meets the circumstance we are in! When our circumstances change – i.e. being in church verses being in the world – we change our allegiance from God to the world. In Psalms 119:113 the Psalmist is saying he too struggles with his double-mindedness and in the next few verses he explains the steps he is taking to remove his "Mr. Hyde" from his mind.

Step 1: Allegiance Shift 100 % to God

Have ever tried to have a relationship with a person who keeps on changing their mind? It is so frustrating! I met this person a while ago who seemed to have a split personality. During the church service this person would seem to be closer to God than anyone I have ever met. She would raise her hands during church, pray with fervour and read the Bible with genuine heart felt praise. When she spoke about God I was stunned at her knowledge and love for Him, it was like the words poured out from her very heart. One day I heard a woman at the shopping mall cursing and swearing at her children. She used the Lord's name in vain many times and called out curses on her children that would make even a sailor blush. I turned to see who it was and to my surprise it was the very same woman who had impressed me at church! How hard it must be for God to have a relationship with this kind of double minded person!

Lest we think too little of this woman and too highly of ourselves we must remember that we are all double minded to some extent. In many areas of our lives we live like we are still slaves to sin. In the ancient world you could voluntarily choose to be a slave of a master and in return you could receive a livelihood. When you became a slave you agreed to obey everything the master told you to do. When we were non Christians we had a body ruled by sin (Romans 6:6) and chose to obey the ruler of this world (2 Corinthians 4:4) with the expectation of receiving the fleeting pleasures of sin (Hebrews 11:25). Now that our old self has been crucified with Christ we are to offer ourselves as slaves to God and are to strive towards holiness. This means our new way of life requires us to obey our new master, Jesus Christ. In Romans 6:16 Paul states we are slaves to the one in which we obey.

How do we know then which master we are obeying? This world has tainted our souls and for those areas of our heart that we have not made Jesus lord. Some things seem to be grey – maybe right,

maybe wrong. This is where God's holy word comes into play. God's word is sharper than any two-edged sword (Hebrews 4:12) and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness (2 Timothy 3:16). Even when the answers cannot be found in God's word – such as what path do you want me on Lord Jesus, James 1:4-8 states we merely need to ask God and He will make the path clear. Here is the catch, our allegiance must be firmly with God and not Satan or we will be tossed by the sifting sands of this culture, regardless of what words or instruction that was received by God. For the Psalmist, allegiance to God was critical to loving and obeying God's word. All things are possible with God but without Him nothing is possible (Matthew 19:26), especially obedience that leads to holiness. If your allegiance is **not** 100 percent for God, then you will only love those words from God that do not correct your sin. This does not mean you will be sinless but only that you through the Spirit's power will give 100 percent of your effort to try to be holy.

Step 2: Pray for Protection from this World

To get rid of double-mindedness is not a hopeless cause. For the Psalmist God is both our refuge and our shield from the persecution that we are about to receive both from the external world and from inside temptations. The first thing the Psalmist prays for is protection from non Christians. Since they are on the broad path they will hate anyone who life personifies the light. Having been choked with the worries, riches and pleasures of life (Luke 8:14), they have been truly given over to a depraved mind (Romans 1:28). They have traded the glory of God to seek and worship the things of this world (Romans 1:23). For a non Christian their master is Satan who tells them to pick any path except the narrow path of righteousness. When approached by a Christian who lives the word, John 3:20 states the non Christian will hate that person because the light he/she shines exposes their darkness. If you lived as the non Christian did they would love you because you are sinning like they do. The more you live your life with 100 percent allegiance to God the more your light will shine and they in turn the more they will hate you! Since the Christian's struggle is against the powers of this dark world (Ephesians 6:12) we need divine protection! In the flesh we are no match for Satan and his demons but with the Spirit (1 John 4:4) we can claim victory in Jesus Christ (Romans 7:24).

The second thing the Psalmist prays for is protection from internal temptations. 1 Peter 4:3 states we as Christians have spent enough time in the past doing what the pagans do. We should now live as one's who will give an account to He who is ready to judge the living and the dead. Paul in Romans 7 states he struggled to stop sinning and embrace God's holiness. To be holy we need to be shielded by our temptation through the power of He who is Holy! Without protection and a shield, we are no match for the devil who roars like a lion (1 Peter 5:8) but with God are protected and shielded so that we can fulfill His command to be holy (1 Peter 1:16).

Step 3: Pray God Will Teach one how to Discern His Truth Rightly

Ever read the word of God and felt overwhelmed? The Bible is made up of 66 books, 39 in the Old Testament and 27 in the New Testament. There are 23,145 verses in the Old Testament NIV and 7,957 in the New Testament. It took over a millennium for all the people to write all the books of the Bible. This means there are numerous cultures of intended readers. There are several genres in the Bible as well such as: the historical narrative, the Law, wisdom, Psalms, prophecies, apocalyptic literature, Gospel and Epistles. Each of these genres require a

different method of interpretation. Discerning the truth contained in the Bible is not easy. To make it even more difficult we live in modern times and tend to read into Scripture our own perspectives. Sometimes it feels like there are as many interpretations of Scripture as there are sands on the sea shore! Does this mean we give up on rightly knowing the truth? The answer is NO.

Our Comforter. In 1 Corinthians 2:14, Paul told the church of Corinth that those who are not born again will perceive the word of God as foolishness because they are not capable of discerning and understanding the truth. In John 16:12-15, Jesus promised He would send a comforter that would guide His own into the truth. In 1 Corinthians 2:9-3:2 it states that only the Spirit knows the things of God. Those born again with the Spirit living inside of them are guided by the Spirit who helps them discern the truth rightly.

Appeal to the Comforter to Reveal the Truth. The Psalmist in 119:130 states “The unfolding of Your words gives light; it gives understanding to the simple.” Who better to teach us the correct interpretation of God’s holy word than God’s Spirit! This does not mean that we as Christians no longer listen to those gifted in teaching (Romans 12:7) such as pastors and university professors. God has given them the spiritual gifts to discern His word rightly (this does not mean that they are incapable of making mistakes). When God Illuminates Scripture for you then test what you have learned from people who have the spiritual gift of teaching and compare it to other passages of Scripture. The Psalmist wants God Himself to teach him – what an absolute honor! Warning: make sure the interpretation you have received truly comes from God and not yourself!

Step 4: Pray God grants you a genuine thirst to read and obey His word

The first and last step are very similar: a cry to have a single minded devotion to God! In teaching us to be slaves of righteousness, God’s word should be more valuable to a Christian than all the gold in the world! If at the core of our being we do not love the word of God to the extent that we hate every wrong path, then we will keep one foot in both kingdoms, Satan’s and God’s.

As modern day Christians there are many distractions that keep us from spending time with God. Like the Psalmist in chapter 1 verse 2, do we love God’s word so much that we meditate on it day and night? For most Christians today the answer has to be NO. We simply love TV, sports, movies, parties and many other activities far more than reading His word that convicts us to change.

Pray today that God will instill into your heart a single minded devotion to love and obey His word. Pray that God will give you protection as you read His word and change to be more like Him. Pray that God will give such a great thirst for His word that you come to hate every wrong path. The Psalmist finishes the section but stating: “may streams of tears flow from our eyes whenever God’s law is not loved and obeyed (verse 136).