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God Speaks Through the Bible

► IN FOCUS

God's Word is His primary means of speaking to us.

► THE PASSAGE

Psalm 19:7-14

LOOK AT OUR WORLD

The Internet is full of sites claiming to guide us and show us what to do. Pick a subject, and someone is ready to give you instruction on the matter. This is nothing new. Solomon said, "There is no end to the making of many books" (Eccl. 12:12). The ultimate guidance we need comes from God, and one way He has revealed His will is through His Word.

► THE SETTING

Psalm 19 has two clearly distinct sections (vv. 1-6, 7-11) with a concluding personal application section (vv. 12-14). Because of some differences in language, subject, style, and form, some Bible teachers think the psalm was formerly two separate psalms that were joined together in the psalter because of their common theme. The psalm's title attributes it to David along with a notation referring to the chief musician who would lead out in worship. Some think David wrote both portions; others think someone else may have written the second portion years later.

We might think of the psalm's structure like a hymn or contemporary song that, although centered on a single theme, speaks to the theme differently in its verses. Each verse concludes with a common refrain. The theme of the psalm is God's revelation: first, a revelation of His glory through nature (the concept of General Revelation) and second, a revelation of His will through the Law or His Word (the concept of Special Revelation). Both are valid in different degrees. "Perhaps the point is that one can know a god vaguely, impersonally through nature, but to know God personally, then the direct revelation of the word is required. . . . In the word, the Lord (*Yahweh*) comes to us personally. Here, we meet a God who is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, abounding in steadfast love, showing faithfulness to the thousandth generation."¹

Our study of God's call to Moses in the previous session affirmed that God takes the initiative to reach out and speak, even in some unusual ways. In this session, we are reminded that God still speaks. He speaks and reveals Himself—and His will—to us through the Bible, God's holy Word.

LEARN GOD'S WAY

► PSALM 19:7-9

What synonyms did the psalmist use in these verses for the spoken/written revelation of the Lord? Why is this revelation from the Lord worthy of being engaged? What effects can it have on the person who is touched by it?

The instruction of the LORD is perfect, renewing one's life; the testimony of the LORD is trustworthy, making the inexperienced wise.⁸ The precepts of the LORD are right, making the heart glad; the command of the LORD is radiant, making the eyes light up.⁹ The fear of the LORD is pure, enduring forever; the ordinances of the LORD are reliable and altogether righteous.

God's Word has powerful effects on us. Verses 7-9 are a carefully constructed unit employing a pattern that includes a series of synonyms for the spoken/written revelation of the Lord, a descriptive word for each synonym describing its value or worth, and the effect or benefit the Lord's revelation has on the one exposed to it. Bible teachers differ on whether the series consists of 5 or 6 items. Some consider verse 7a to be the theme which is then expanded upon in verses 7b-9, much as verse 1 is the theme for what followed in verses 2-6. However, others see verse 7a as the first item in a series of six.

The verses describe a way by which **the LORD** (*Yahweh*)—the personal covenant name of God—can be known. Notice the frequency with which this important phrase—*of the Lord*—is used. Let there be no doubt about the source or origin of this revelation. It is *of* and from *the Lord*. He desires to make Himself known to all humankind, because He wants each person to know Him. Moreover, He wants His people to know how to live their lives in ways that bring glory to Him. They don't have to figure it out on their own; He tells them what He expects and what is pleasing in His sight.

instruction (“law,” KJV) is from the Hebrew word *torah*. In general, *torah* means “instruction, teachings, direction.” Early on, the word was used in reference to the Decalogue (Ten Commandments) or the Pentateuch (the Books of Law; the first five books of the Bible). But in time, *torah* came to represent the totality of all of God’s instructions in the Old Testament. The *instruction of the LORD* then is “the law of the LORD” (KJV) to His people. From our Christian perspective, it is accurate for us to include the New Testament writings as well, for they, along with the Old Testament, comprise the full counsel of God.

Perfect can refer to moral perfection, which certainly would be true in reference to the Lord’s Word. His Word is true, accurate, void of imperfection or of anything that might mislead the reader. However, the word for *perfect* can also be understood as “complete.” What the Lord has given in His Word is complete. Do not be deceived by those who claim they have received an additional word from the Lord that supplements or supersedes what is found in Holy Scripture.

This true and complete Word from the Lord is capable of **renewing one’s life** (“converting,” KJV). *Converting* comes from the Hebrew word (*shub*) that captures the sense of repentance, meaning to turn back to God. Other translations say the Word is capable of “restoring” (NASB), “reviving” (ESV), “refreshing” (NIV), or “renewing” (CSB). **One’s life** means “soul” (KJV). His Word is a transforming, revitalizing, and refreshing Word of life.

The spoken/written revelation from the Lord is **the testimony** that bears witness on His behalf. (The NIV rendering differs here from most other English translations by its use of the word “statutes.”) The Hebrew word means “witness” or “evidence of things.” The witness of the Lord’s Word, the evidence it offers about Him is **trustworthy**; “sure,” (KJV). You can depend on it; you can believe it. Think in terms of legal proceedings. A witness is expected to give a testimony that is true, trustworthy, dependable, and credible. A false witness or report is of no value to one whose life hangs in the balance. In fact, it can be dangerous. Because the Lord’s Word is a reliable testimony, it is capable of **making the inexperienced wise**. *Inexperienced* (“the simple,” KJV) does not refer to

simple-minded people but to a person who has an open mind to hear truth and act upon it. That in itself is a sign of a **wise** person. The height of foolishness would be to hear truth and then ignore it or close one's mind to it.

The Word from the Lord is His **precepts** or “statutes” (KJV). *Precepts* can refer to ordinances, customs, or practices. In this verse, they refer to instructions, appointed orders, or directions for ethical living. They can be counted on because they are right, meaning “upright, straight forward, and correct.” The one who lives according to His instructions will discover it **making the heart glad**; joy and gladness in the inner being. Being *glad* is more than external happiness. It is a deep-seated joy that moves beyond circumstances. Some may think reading and studying the Bible is drudgery or a boring practice. Such thinking misrepresents what God makes known about Himself through His Word. He is a God of joy; His Word is a message of joy. See Nehemiah 8:9-12 for an example that the reading of the Word of the Lord is an occasion for celebration and rejoicing, not mourning or grieving.

The spoken and written word from the Lord is His **command**—collectively His mandates—specifying what He requires and expects. They are **radiant**, “pure” (KJV). *Pure* means “sincere” and suggests transparency. The Lord has no hidden agenda, but with clarity of purpose, declares what He desires. **Making the eyes light up**, “enlightening the eyes” (KJV), is imagery to indicate how being obedient to pure truth “lights up” our lives. We see—understand, comprehend—its brilliance and are intellectually, morally, and spiritually enlightened by it.

The use of **fear** in verse 9 as a synonym seems to disrupt the structure. While *fear* can refer to the emotional response of being afraid, more often in Scripture to *fear* is “to revere, hold in awe.” *Fear* also reminds us of the attitude with which we are to approach what the Lord has made known. In relation to God, both reverence and awe are foundational to worship. Perhaps that was what the psalmist had in mind. Consider substituting the word *fear* with the words “the awesome revelation” *of the Lord* or with “that which we revere” *from the Lord*. God's Word is superior to any other. **Pure** means “unadulterated, without alloy.” The Lord's revelation

contains nothing tainted or that will taint the one who receives it. Just as it is purged of impurity, it has the ability to purge impurity. **Enduring for ever** means it knows no end; it is eternally established, always relevant. The prophet Isaiah affirmed the enduring quality and unchanging character of God's Word (Isa. 40:8), a message that Peter included in his first letter (1 Pet. 1:24-25).

The Word from the Lord is His **ordinances** ("judgments" KJV; "rules" ESV; "decrees" NIV). *Ordinances* ("judgments," KJV) is derived from the same Hebrew word as the word *justice*. His judgments are His verdicts or decisions in matters of right and wrong. They are **reliable**, "true" (KJV), and "firm" (NIV). They are stable and faithful; consistent and unwavering. Hence, we can depend on them; they do not change according to the seasons or the whims of the capricious false deities worshiped by the pagans.

What are a few lasting lessons that come from Psalm 19:7-9?

- The Lord has revealed Himself through His spoken/written Word.
- His Word is perfect in every way, completely reliable, true and right, pure and clean.
- His Word brings renewal, refreshment, right-thinking, and rejoicing in the heart to the one who interacts with it.
- His Word is valuable for knowing how to live and is satisfying to those seeking peace of mind and heart—the essence of His will.

► PSALM 19:10-11

What two metaphors does the psalm use to describe God's Word? How does each apply? What personal application does the psalmist make of the effect of the Word on his life? What promise is associated with keeping the Word of God?

¹⁰ They are more desirable than gold—than an abundance of pure gold; and sweeter than honey dripping from a honeycomb. ¹¹ In addition, your servant is warned by them, and in keeping them there is an abundant reward.

God’s Word brings us pleasure but also warns us. Verse 10 may apply to the last statement in verse 9 or to all that has been said thus far. **They are more desirable than gold—than an abundance of pure gold.** *Gold*, of course, was—and still is—a most valuable commodity. *Pure gold* denotes refined gold, wherein the impurities have been removed. Thus, in all aspects, the Word of the Lord is “more precious” (NIV) than *an abundance of pure gold*.

Having appealed to one’s sense of value, the psalmist next appealed to one’s sense of taste. It is **sweeter than honey dripping from a honeycomb**. *Honey* dripping from the comb was another valued commodity that could be used as a medium of exchange. Furthermore, its sweet taste brought pleasure to the one who consumed it. Interacting with the Lord’s Word is a desirable, valuable, sweet, and satisfying experience. God’s Word is more valuable than a pocket full of money or a plateful of our favorite food.

The study of God’s Word is more than an academic exercise or religious ritual. The psalmist understood Holy Scripture as a personal word from a personal God. Therefore, he considered its meaning for him personally. —the Lord’s revelation—**your servant is warned by them**. The psalmist understood the nature of his relationship with the Lord; he was a *servant*; the Lord was his Master. To warn is “to teach or admonish.” The Master teaches or admonishes; the servant heeds and obeys. **In keeping them there is an abundant reward**, or benefit. *Keeping* includes observing, giving heed to, and guarding; again, more than merely reading. The *reward* would come in knowing that you are living in righteousness, pleasing to the Lord, adding glory to His name just as do the heavens (v. 1).

What are a few lasting lessons that come from Psalm 19:10-11?

- God’s Word is of immense value to the one who receives it.
- God’s Word brings pleasure to the one who obeys it.

- God's Word gives a warning to all who serve Him.
- All who serve Him and keep His Word shall be blessed.

NOTES

► PSALM 19:12-14

What two categories of sin did the psalmist identify? What does the psalmist need the Lord to do in relation to his sin? What commitment and confession did the psalmist make in concluding the psalm? What does it mean to declare the Lord is our strength and our redeemer?

¹² **Who perceives his unintentional sins? Cleanse me from my hidden faults.** ¹³ **Moreover, keep your servant from willful sins; do not let them rule me. Then I will be blameless and cleansed from blatant rebellion.** ¹⁴ **May the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable to you, Lord, my rock and my Redeemer.**

God's Word convicts us and guides us in right living. With the idea of warning in mind, the psalmist sought strength to overcome sin in his life so that he might be acceptable unto the Lord. **Who perceives his unintentional sins?** *Perceives* denotes “to understand,” “to discern,” “to give heed to.” We may not always see—be aware or attentive to—our . . . “The phrase . . . was [the psalmists'] confession that he had not seen some of his wrongdoing, but he was guilty of breaking God's law. Our fallen nature prevents us from seeing how sinful we are, and the more we learn God's truth in His Word, the more we see how much of our sin was hidden from us until God's Word revealed it to us. The psalmist was confessing his sinfulness and his ignorance.”² Because we are mortal beings with a sinful nature, we may sin even when we don't intend to or in ways we were not aware of at the time. Thus, the psalmist pleads, **cleanse me.** *Cleanse*, of course, means “to purge,” “to clear,” but it also can mean “to be free, be exempt from punishment, to hold innocent.” The psalmist asked for forgiveness (“Declare me innocent,” ESV, “Acquit me,” NASB) **from hidden faults.**

The psalmist again referred to himself as **your servant**, which implies privilege and responsibility. He knew he stood before the Lord in grace but with accountability. **Keep . . . from** was an appeal for the Lord's intervention. Even though he was committed to serving the Lord, the psalmist was aware of his own weaknesses. Left to himself, he also would be guilty of **willful sins**, meaning "presumptuous sins" (KJV). *Presumptuous* comes from a word meaning "proud" or "arrogant"; thus, it suggests that the sins the psalmist had in mind were those that spring from personal ambition and ego. But in truth, all sin is an expression of our pride and arrogance, thinking more of ourselves than we ought to think; believing that we are the final authority in our lives.

He desired that the Lord would let **them** (his proclivity to sin and his acts of sin [sins]) **not let them rule over**, or "have dominion over" (KJV) him. Only then could he **be blameless**, meaning "be upright" (KJV). Only then could he be **cleansed** ("innocent," KJV; "acquitted, NASB) **from blatant rebellion**. *Cleansed* ("innocent," KJV) comes from a word that means "to be clear, to be exempt, to be free." It is the same word rendered *cleanse* in verse 12. *Rebellion* is one of several words used—especially by the psalmists—to describe sin against the Lord. It usually has the connotation of being rebellious. Hence, *blatant rebellion* can be rendered "great transgression." The person who sins intentionally is openly rebelling against the Lord.

The psalmist was aware of his tendency to sin, both unintentionally and intentionally. "He is aware of his inadequacy as a human being, slipping back into his old ways through carelessness; he is aware of the human weakness which so easily yields to temptation, but he is also conscious of the divine grace which has the power to forgive him his sins and to preserve him from sinning."³ Therefore, he appealed to the Lord for help.

His consideration of God's revelation led him to offer a prayer of commitment and confession; one that is used often in both our personal and public worship. He desired that **the words of** (his) **mouth**—what he said—and **the meditations**—the musings, thoughts—**of** (his) **heart**—his inner self, the center of his being, would **be acceptable** to the Lord. *Meditations* is actually a musi-

cal term that suggests solemnity. *Meditations* are not frivolous, shallow, or spurious thoughts, but solemn reflections.

We reveal who we truly are by what we say, the words we choose, and the topics we discuss. Moreover, our thoughts and the subjects we choose to think about influence how we act, what we do, and reveal what we consider worthwhile. The psalmist wanted what he said and thought to be **acceptable to you** (the Lord). *Acceptable* can be rendered pleasurable, delightful, or favorable. The KJV uses the word “sight,” which comes from a word that means “face” and came to represent presence. The psalmist wanted to be a delight to the Lord as he stood face-to-face before Him.

His desire was driven by who he recognized God to be. He was **LORD**, the covenant God, who had shown Himself to be preeminent but personal, demanding but caring. **My rock** is translated “my strength” in the KJV. *Rock* is used often in the Old Testament to speak of the Lord as strength in time of trouble and as a refuge from the storm. *Rock* as a name for God occurred first in the Old Testament in Deuteronomy 32:4, 15, and 18. The psalmists used two different words that can be translated “rock” a dozen times or more as a title or in reference to God (See Ps. 18:2, as an example). One of those words is the same word used here *as strength*.

This way of addressing God may have originated because the mountains were often the location for personal encounters with Him, such as was the case with Moses (Ex. 3:1; 19:20). In that sense, a person would go to “the Rock.” Recall that Moses encountered God on the mountain more than once. Another option is that the name suggests the security provided by the rocky crags that became refuges from the wind, rain, or other dangers. In addition, just as a mighty rock was firm, strong, and immovable, God, as “the Rock,” was a reliable foundation.

Redeemer is another term used to speak of God that is rooted in the Old Testament. **My** indicates the personal relationship the psalmist had with the Lord. A *redeemer* was one who acted on behalf of a kinsman by purchasing his freedom. God took action to free His people from bondage. Ultimately, He would free all people from the tyranny of sin by giving His Son, who would be

the Redeemer and the redemption price. Moreover, through His Son, the eternal Word (John 1:1), God would give His fullest revelation of Himself (John 1:14, 18; Heb. 1:1-3). Through the living Word, Jesus, we are acceptable to God, strengthened for living, and redeemed from sin.

What are some lasting truths that come from Psalm 19:12-14?

- Our lives can be marked by unintentional and intentional sin.
- The Lord brings conviction but also forgiveness of confessed sin.
- The desire of our hearts ought to be to please the Lord.
- The search for God's will ends in obedience to His Word.
- The Lord is still our Strength and our Redeemer.

LIVE IT OUT

As part of an exercise in our Sunday morning Bible study group, I marked a spot on the white board designating the church building and another marking the location of my house. I then talked about the half dozen routes I could take to get home from the church when the session was over. Several factors influenced which one might be the best route, including the number of traffic lights, various speed limits, traffic flow, and so forth. How could I decide which to take? One group member offered a solution. Rely on my automobile's GPS. Based on the internal information contained in it, the device could determine the best route and even estimate my time of arrival.

Spiritually speaking, we can find ourselves in an analogous situation. We see where we are at a particular point in our lives. We know where we want to be, what we want to become in our relationship with the Lord. We desire to fulfill His purpose for our lives; we want to bring Him pleasure and glory. So, how do we do that? Do we have a spiritual GPS that will give us accurate, trustworthy direction? Well, in a sense we do. God gives us directions for living, for understanding His will, for becoming

what He desires us to be. We look to His Word wherein He makes Himself known to us. As we get to know Him more and more, we learn more and more about His will for our lives. We can follow His directions all the way “home.”

As you review the synonyms for God's spoken or written Word, with which do you resonate most?

Review the benefits that come from God's Word in verses 7-10. How have those benefits been a reality for you?

How would you describe the value of the Scriptures to you?

What life experience have you had in which your study of God's Word helped you discern His direction for your life in both the short term and the long term?

As you reflect on the Lord's revelation of Himself, what confession of sin are you led to make today?

As you consider the power and beauty of God's Word, what fresh commitments to His will are you willing to make today?

What is your testimony of God being your strength and redeemer? Who might be encouraged by hearing that testimony?

1. Nancy deClaissé-Walford, Rolf A. Jacobson, and Beth Laneel Tanner, "Psalm 19," in *The Book of Psalms, in The New International Commentary on the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2014), 213.
2. Allan Moseley, "Bible Commentary," in "God Revealed," in *Explore the Bible: Adult Leader Guide*, Summer 2017, session 7 (Nashville: LifeWay, 2017), 79.
3. Artur Weiser. *The Psalms: A Commentary*, translated by Herman Hartwell in *The Old Testament Library* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1962), 203.