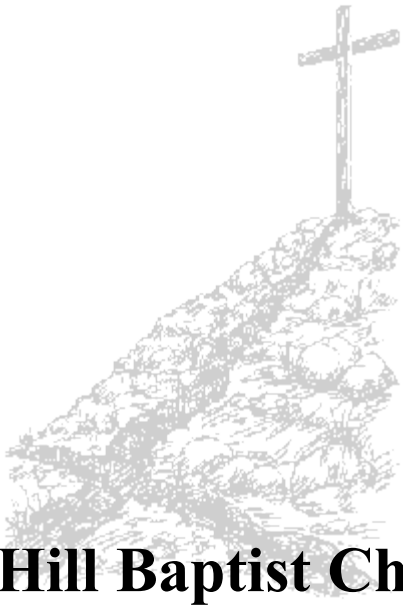


# Taking Heed of God's Word

Psalm 119:9-16



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**FOCAL** Psalms 119:9-16 Wherewithal shall a young man cleanse his way? by taking heed thereto according to thy word. (10) **With my whole heart have I sought thee: O let me not wander from thy commandments.** (11) Thy word have I hid in mine heart, that I might not sin against thee. (12) **Blessed art thou, O LORD: teach me thy statutes.** (13) With my lips have I declared all the judgments of thy mouth. (14) **I have rejoiced in the way of thy testimonies, as much as in all riches.** (15) I will meditate in thy precepts, and have respect unto thy ways. (16) **I will delight myself in thy statutes: I will not forget thy word.**<sup>KJV</sup>

Nicodemus comes to a Great Miracle Worker by night. Could this be the Messiah? Could this be God in the flesh? As He speaks, the Man tells tells him that he must be “born again”. Born again? How can I be “born again”? His reply was, “Listen to the wind in the trees, Nicodemus. You know it to be there. You see it's power, you see it stripping leaves from the trees. Yet you do not see the wind. So it is with God. You see the work of God's Spirit but, like the wind, you do not see Him. You see the effect of God's Word in creation, but do not see Him. You do see Me – the Son of God, the Word made flesh. You must be born again. Listen to the wind, Nicodemus, listen to the wind. (John 3:1-10; 1:1-10).

The Word made flesh lives His life among us, dying for us, and rising on the third day just as He promised. As He prepared to return to the Father our Savior and Lord gathered His few remaining disciples together. Why do you go, dear Jesus? Will you not restore Israel to her

power? His answer, just as it was with Nicodemus, was “listen to the Wind”. Go to an upper room, pray, and you shall receive power. The Wind of God, the Blessed Holy Spirit – the Third Person of the Godhead – shall come upon you. After that you will receive power, and you shall witness. Listen to the Wind, My Beloved, listen to the Wind.

Oh, that we who believe would listen to God, to love His Word. It is no accident that God defines His Word as both this Book that I now hold in my hand as well as the Person of Jesus Christ, God the Son, the Living Word of God. The Holy Bible, the Written Word of God, exists to point to Jesus Christ, the Living Word of God. The First Adam fell into sin, but even in his falling the Book pointed to the coming of the Second Adam, our Lord Jesus. The first murder in Scripture, when Cain took Abel's life, occurred because man would try and come to God without an offering of Blood. Let us avoid Calvary and the Cross of Christ, an is intrinsically good enough without such superstitious nonsense! We need no such thing to reach God, just our good works. Yet when God rejected Cain's bloodless offering, for the Word *must become flesh, dwell among us, and die for us*, Cain responded by shedding the blood of his innocent brother. Without the Blood of the Word our hand is too quickly turned to evil, too quickly turned to sin.

### **1. God Demands Practical Holiness At An Early Age**

The world does not like the *idea* of sin, yet the Scripture – from first to last – clearly defines sin as our default if we do not focus on God's Word. In the “ABCs” of this one hundred and nineteenth Psalm, this BETH or second

set of *eight verses* begins by saying:

**FOCAL Psalms 119:9 Wherewithal shall a young man cleanse his way? by taking heed thereto according to thy word.**

How does a young man cleanse his way? How does a young person maintain a pure way of life, or how does one follow after *practical holiness*? This question *presumes* that all are sinners, especially the **young**. If a person will not cleanse his way when he is young, if he will not follow after practical holiness, if he will not heed the Word of God, then several things can occur – all of them destructive. If a young plant is set in poor ground, it will never flourish. If a young person is set in a poor way, he shall never flourish. Jesus Christ warned us:

**Matthew 7:13-16 Enter ye in at the strait gate: for wide is the gate, and broad is the way, that leadeth to destruction, and many there be which go in thereat: (14) Because strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it. (15) Beware of false prophets, which come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravening wolves. (16) Ye shall know them by their fruits. Do men gather grapes of thorns, or figs of thistles?**

There is a constant battle going on all around us and,

sadly, few of us recognize it. **False prophets** abound, telling our young people of a wide path they should follow. When we hear the words **false prophets**, many of us think of leaders of cults, of New Age doctrines, of religious leaders who have departed from the Holy Scripture. In our day the **false prophets** that are most dangerous to our young people are not tied to religion. Their names are **Oprah, Maurie, Jerry, Bono, and other Hollywood stars**. They promote anything but the Word of God – sex, drugs, violence, blasphemies. And sadly, many parents *and Churches* do nothing to present practical holiness to the young.

Christianity is a faith that *must be lived* if it is to have any value in the life. Listen to the wind – live the Word! The text says:

**FOCAL Psalms 119:9 Wherewithal shall a young man cleanse his way? by taking heed<sup>1</sup> thereto according to thy word.**

The Word of God must be heeded, must be lived. I myself hate to go to any place without a map. Some time ago I tried an Internet map service, one of the newer ones, and followed that map as if it were the Gospel. I got lost somewhere in Natchez Trace State Park, a huge place, and I thought I was never going to get home. Just because it has “map” written on it doesn’t mean that it is

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1 Qal Infinitive of H8104, שָׁמַר, *shâmar, shaw-mar'*, A primitive root; properly to *hedge* about (as with thorns), that is, *guard*; generally to *protect, attend to*, etc.: - beware, be circumspect, take heed (to self), keep (-er, self), mark, look narrowly, observe, preserve, regard, reserve, save (self), sure, (that lay) wait (for), watch (-man).

a map. You can follow the wrong map with the greatest of care, and still get lost. The map that the wise person will follow is the Word of God – this will never lead us wrong. Another example – and I pray that you do not think me to be preaching on myself too much (though I delight in my foolishness if it promotes the Lord God) – from my misspent youth. When I was young and on the coast of North Carolina fishing in Core Sound, I got a little too bold one day and went out into an area I did not know. I was speeding along in my little fishing boat when I suddenly struck bottom. Here I am, miles from land, and I hit land! Unbelievable. Listen My Beloved, when we go on our merry way along life's waters without a good map, we may quickly find ourselves shipwrecked. I have heard of the pharmacist who, in a moment of mental wandering, gave a person the wrong prescription. That person died, for he was allergic to what was given. What may have appeared to be a useful medicine to one person was poison to another.

The Christian must not follow the ways of man, but of God and His Word.

Where the King James says **by taking heed thereto according to Thy Word**, this is better rendered as the **Holman Christian Standard** does it,

**Psalms 119:9 How can a young man keep his way pure? By keeping {or guarding} Your word.**

When God's Word is kept, when we *put the precepts of the Word into practical use*, we will never find ourselves

to be shipwrecked. Walk according to God's Word. As verse 1 of this text said:

**Psalms 119:1 Blessed are the undefiled in the way, who walk in the law of the LORD.**

God's Word is not just to be known doctrinally, but it is to be lived *practically*. Do what it says. Meditate on it. See how Jesus Christ our Lord lived it out, then do as He did. Once *justified or declared innocent by faith in Jesus*, we go on to *sanctification*. The Scripture says:

**Romans 5:1-2 Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ: (2) By whom also we have access by faith into this grace wherein we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God.**

There is no peace with God unless you walk according to His direction, unless you seek His face. You will know peace with God if you focus on His direction, on His Word even in the midst of life's trials.

## **2. Practical Holiness Comes Only By Hiding The Word In Our Hearts**

**FOCAL Psalms 119:10 With my whole heart have I sought thee: O let me not wander**

## **from thy commandments.**

Practical and useful holiness requires a **whole heart** approach to God. Light hearted seekers of God will not find Him. They are much like **Simon** who, seeing the works of the Apostles, tried to purchase the power of God with money.

**Acts 8:18-23 And when Simon saw that through laying on of the apostles' hands the Holy Ghost was given, he offered them money, (19) Saying, Give me also this power, that on whomsoever I lay hands, he may receive the Holy Ghost. (20) But Peter said unto him, Thy money perish with thee, because thou hast thought that the gift of God may be purchased with money. (21) Thou hast neither part nor lot in this matter: for thy heart is not right in the sight of God. (22) Repent therefore of this thy wickedness, and pray God, if perhaps the thought of thine heart may be forgiven thee. (23) For I perceive that thou art in the gall of bitterness, and in the bond of iniquity.**

The Gift of God cannot be purchased with money. Too many people approach Christianity with a *Burger King* mentality, believing that they can follow this fad or that fad and be right with God. Those who are right with God are those who seek the Lord **with their whole heart**. They realize that life is a *partnership with God*, and realize that God does not call us into a *sometimes*

relationship but to an *always* relationship with Him.

The Christian *exerts* himself, but does not *trust* in his own power. God is to be trusted, His Spirit is the guard over our lives. When the believer's heart begins to wander from God, when we begin to forget that we are:

**Ephesians 2:19 ... fellow citizens with the saints, and of the household of God;**

then our lives cease to have real meaning. As long as Israel obeyed the Word of God, following Him where ever He led, they remained victorious. When Israel turned away from the Word of God and began to focus their hearts on the things of Egypt, they lost the blessings of God. The Christian, like Israel of old, was saved from Egypt, saved from this present darkness, to walk in newness of life:

**Romans 6:4-6 Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life. (5) For if we have been planted together in the likeness of his death, we shall be also in the likeness of his resurrection: (6) Knowing this, that our old man is crucified with him, that the body of sin might be destroyed, that henceforth we should not serve sin.**

How do we avoid servitude to sin? How do we avoid

falling into the mire, being sucked down into the quicksand of evil that is all around us? The Psalmist states:

**FOCAL Psalms 119:11 .. Thy word have I hid in mine heart, that I might not sin against thee.**

The Christian is *justified* at the point of salvation. You can never be more justified than you are now, never be more *saved*. We are, as the Scripture says, saved

**Ephesians 2:9 Not of works, lest any man should boast.**

You are saved by faith in God, justified by belief in Jesus Christ. Yet it is also true of the Christian that:

**Ephesians 2:10 For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them.**

**Illustrate** The Christian can *never* be more saved, *never* be more justified, but he or she *must* grow as the workmanship of God. This growth in our walk what the Scripture calls *sanctification* – specifically *progressive sanctification*. As you **hide the Word of God in the heart** God takes this Word, applies it to your life, and draws you farther and farther away from sin. The effect can be likened to a man standing on board a ship. You

place yourself on the ship, you dwell on the ship, and as the ship sets sail the shoreline – the things of this world – grow smaller and smaller in *your perspective*. The reason that many Christians do not grow in the Lord and wallow in the same sins over and over again is that they do not *get on the ship*. No longer estranged from God, they wander aimlessly, like Israel, always looking backward to Egypt. While you wander in that state and avoid the Biblical focus you will *never grow up to be what God wants you to be*.

Do you believe that God wanted the first generation of Israel to die pitifully in the desert? Do you believe that God wanted Israel to wander foolishly in circles for forty years, appearing to the world to be drunken fools? Absolutely not! It is God's design for us that we **hide His Word in our hearts, so that we do not sin against Him**. We are treasured by God so much that He gave up everything for us. God wants us to realize that, as His treasures, He does not want us *stolen by the thief called sin*. Sin, like a terrible burglar, entered into the world

**Romans 5:12 ... sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned:**

bringing with it death. Do you think that sin has changed over the years, becoming more fragrant, more lovely? This is what Satan would have you believe, but not what our Loving God will tell you. Sin *always* brings with it death. This is what the young man needs to learn if he wants to be an old man. Sin brings death, and like a plague brings death to those in its periphery. Like poison

oak or ivy, it infects one person, then spreads to another. The sin of Israel continued to dash against Moses until he himself was infected with the same curse. How to avoid it? **Hide God's Word in your hearts**. Teach God's Word to your children.

### **3. How Shall I Hide God's Word In My Heart?**

**FOCAL** Psalms 119:13-16 **With my lips have I declared all the judgments of thy mouth. (14) I have rejoiced in the way of thy testimonies, as much as in all riches. (15) I will meditate in thy precepts, and have respect unto thy ways. (16) I will delight myself in thy statutes: I will not forget thy word.**<sup>KJV</sup>

How are we to **hide God's Word** in our hearts? The Psalmist gives us several methods.

1. **FOCAL** Psalms 119:13 **With my lips have I declared** all the judgments of thy mouth.

The Psalmist speaks of **declaring God's Word with his lips**. Teach others what you know. Start with your family, and share the truths of God's Word with your husband, your wife, your children, your parents. Tell others what God has told you. In ancient Israel people rarely had a Bible of their own, as the sacred Text was reproduced by hand. The Jews therefore told their children and one another what they heard in Synagogue. That's a good practice that we as Christians should live by today. When you tell others what you have learned, you re-enforce these things in your own hearts.

2. **FOCAL** Psalms 119:14 **I have rejoiced in the way of thy testimonies, as much as in all riches.**

Begin to regard time in study of God's Word not a *chore to be done*, but a *treasure from God*. How sad that the Christian of yesteryear would sit under the preaching of the Word of God for an hour or two, but so many people today get upset when the preacher goes longer than thirty minutes. Many of you will watch football or baseball games over a period of several hours – including lascivious commercials – without losing your focus. Others of you will surf the Internet for hours, playing games on the MSN Network, but find it hard to treasure the time it takes to study God's Word. Jesus said:

**Matthew 6:21 For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.**

Teach yourselves that the study of God's Word in private and in public is a *treasure beyond measure*. This treasure does not depend solely on the qualifications of the preacher (though I do pray daily that I were a better preacher). God the Holy Spirit will take that Word if you treasure it and use it to grow you as the **workmanship of God**. Treasure the time in The Word *more* than you treasure the words of the **false prophets of television and movies**, and you will be blessed.

3. **FOCAL** Psalms 119:15 **I will meditate in thy**

**precepts, and have respect unto thy ways.**

The Scripture tells us to **meditate on God's Word**, to prayerfully consider what you have read. When you eat food you must also take the time to *digest* it. The ancient Romans did damage to their bodies by over eating, then by forcing themselves to regurgitate that food so they could eat more. When you prayerfully meditate on the Word and apply it to your life, you cause yourselves to grow in practical discipleship. And finally,

4. **FOCAL** Psalms 119:16 **I will delight myself in thy statutes: I will not forget thy word.**

the Christian is to **remember or memorize** what God has told you, to keep His Word in your mind. You will not readily forget what you have treasured. The Scripture that you store in your hearts by memory will be the Scripture that you carry with you no matter where you go.

God's Word in conjunction with God's Spirit within us is the most powerful tool we have in this present world. May God touch your hearts to focus on His Word!