

Blessed are the undefiled in the way, who walk in the law of the LORD! Blessed are those who keep his testimonies, who seek him with the whole heart! They also do no iniquity; they walk in his ways. You have commanded us to keep your precepts diligently. Oh, that my ways were directed to keep your statutes! Then I would not be ashamed, when I look into all your commandments. I will praise you with uprightness of heart, when I learn your righteous judgements. I will keep your statutes; oh, do not forsake me utterly!

(Psalm 119:1–8)

Introduction

In the world of numbers, an integer is a number that can be written without a fractional component. That is, an integer is a *whole* number. For example, the number 4 is an integer; the number $4\frac{1}{4}$ (4.25) is not. In fact, “integer” comes from a Latin word that means “whole.” That same Latin word is the root word for the English word “integrity,” which speaks of being whole and undivided. When it comes to the person with integrity, what you see is what is. There is no hidden fraction in his life that contradicts the whole.

In the world of the Christian, integrity has to do with every part of our body being devoted to God (1 Thessalonians 5:23). The goal is Christlike wholeness of devotion in body and mind. Jesus was a man of integrity. Pontius Pilate examined Jesus life and concluded, “I find no fault in this man” (Luke 23:4). At his baptism, and again on the mount of transfiguration, the Father audibly said of the Son, “This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased” (Matthew 3:17; see Matthew 17:5). Paul spoke of Jesus as one “who knew no sin” (2 Corinthians 5:21), and Peter wrote of him as “a lamb without blemish and without spot” (1 Peter 1:19).

Complete Christlikeness is the destiny of every Christian. Therefore, it should be our desire and our determination.

But how? How do we strive to be people of integrity? Integrity, for the Christian, requires a relationship with the Word of God and a right relationship with God in prayer. Psalm 119 emphasises both.

This is, of course, both the longest psalm and the longest chapter in the Bible. The psalmist references the Word of God in almost every verse. The only exceptions, depending on how you interpret these specific verses, are vv. 84, 90, 121, 122, and 132—and even then it is possible that the psalmist is referencing the Word in some of those verses. Simply put, in at least 171 of 176 verses (and perhaps more), the psalmist focuses on God’s Word.

But this is also a psalm that emphasises prayer. In every verse, except vv. 1–3, the psalmist prays directly to God. This is a prayer about living for God. It is a life-transforming psalm. The psalmist wanted to know God’s Word, and God’s Word (and his desire to know it) drove him to his knees.

Loving and knowing God’s Word might literally save your life. George Wishart was a Scottish reformer, who was sentenced to death by hanging. Spurgeon tells the story that, when the day of his execution arrived, his hope of pardon had not arrived. As was the custom of the day, he was asked which psalm he would like to

sing at his execution. Stalling for time, he requested Psalm 119. As legend has it, about two thirds of the way into the song the pardon arrived!

The story is likely apocryphal, but it illustrates the point: The Word of God saves us. (And it also sanctifies us.) I trust that, as we journey through this psalm, the Lord would build into us a holy life, so that we would be increasingly saved from our sins.

This psalm is a masterpiece of poetry. In your English Bible, you will notice that it is divided into 22 sections. Each section is headed with a letter of the Hebrew alphabet (*aleph, beth*, etc.). There are 22 letters in the Hebrew alphabet. The psalmist compiled this poem in such a way that each verse of each eight-verse section began with the Hebrew letter with which that section is headed. Hebrew mothers actually used to use this psalm to help their children to read. Second Timothy 3:15 suggests that Timothy's mother used this method in schooling him.

If the longest chapter in the Bible emphasises the Word of God and prayer, it should say something to us!

The theme of these opening verses is integrity—wholeness. As I have said, this is the theme and goal of the Christian life, and it is this subject that the psalmist addresses here. Briefly, there are at least six things related to integrity with which the psalmist deals.

Integrity and Prosperity

The writer begins with the relation between integrity and prosperity: “Blessed are the undefiled in the way, who walk in the law of the LORD! Blessed are those who keep his testimonies” (vv. 1–2a).

He pronounces a blessing upon the “undefiled.” The word speaks of being perfect, complete, entire, whole or upright. It means to be free from blemish. The word was used to describe Noah as a “perfect” man in his generations (Genesis 6:9). A Passover lamb was to be “without blemish” (Exodus 12:5). The word is used some twenty times in Leviticus to describe sacrifices required by God and various issues pertaining to ceremonial uncleanness.

Blessing, of course, speaks of happiness.

The blameless are blessed. The happy are holy. The pure are prosperous. Those prosper who know the will of God and do it (see Joshua 1:8–9). And the truly prosperous follow God's directions. They get there. They attain the goal of integrity.

The promise is not that integrity guarantees health, wealth and a problem free life. But those who, before God, are passionate about pursuing holiness, experience the reality of divine happiness.

Integrity and Priority

The psalmist next draws attention to the priority of the one who walks with integrity: “who seek him with the whole heart” (v. 2b). This, in fact, is the key to the entire psalm: *Undivided devotion* to God drives us to *undivided attention* to the Word of God, which motivates us to *unceasing supplication* to God.

Those who walk with integrity have undivided devotion to God. They seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness (Matthew 6:33). By contrast, “those who regard worthless idols forsake their own mercy” (Jonah 2:8). And those who seek first the kingdom of God are driven to their knees in supplication. God—through prayer and the Word—will be their priority, and integrity will flow from that.

Integrity and Purity

Third, the psalmist highlights the relationship between integrity and purity: “They also do no iniquity; they walk in his ways” (v. 3). The vertical relationship affects their horizontal relationships. They do not walk in perverse injustice. They do no wrong to others.

Those who love God’s Word, and who learn God’s Word, and who pray to obey God’s Word grow in their relationship with God, and that overflows into a better relationship with others. The greatest commandment is to love the Lord your God with heart, soul, mind and strength. The second is to love your neighbour as yourself. The one flows from the other.

True social justice can never be separated from justification. William Wilberforce, humanly responsible for bringing an end to the slave trade throughout the British Empire, was motivated by his convictions regarding justification by faith alone. He also loved Psalm 119. In fact, according to his journal, he one day walked to parliament reciting Psalm 119! His commitment to God’s Word drove him to a commitment to justice. The gospel transformed his worldview so that, in the words of Micah, he committed to do justly, to love mercy as he walked humbly with his God (Micah 6:8).

Integrity and Authority

In vv. 4–6, the psalmist draws attention to the relationship between integrity and authority: “You have commanded us to keep your precepts diligently. Oh, that my ways were directed to keep your statutes! Then I would not be ashamed, when I look into all your commandments.”

This is the rub! Salvation, and hence sanctification, are authority issues.

“Diligently” means quickly or speedily. God’s “precepts” are his mandates and his “statutes” his decrees. Prosperity and true blessedness are found under God’s Word. A young man, who was some time ago disciplined by our church, repented and came back. Recently, he gave a testimony before the church to the effect that, in his rebellion against God’s authority, he found no blessedness or prosperity. And older church member, who has only been saved for a short time, recently told me that, for all his unbelieving years, his biggest problem was with the authority claims of Christianity. He did not want to submit to authority—until God changed his heart. Now he has a submissive attitude to God and God’s authorities, and he has found true prosperity and blessedness.

The writer understood that integrity is measured by conformity to God’s standards. God’s authority is what believers must constantly surrender to. It’s not always easy. Indeed, the psalmist prayed that his ways to be directed to keep God’s statutes. It was not something that came naturally to him. He needed divine help. He prayed that God would help him to submit to divine authority.

The wise, however, know that true happiness depends on submission to God's authority. And if God hears our prayer to be in and under his Word, we will not be "ashamed." We will not find ourselves constantly convicted because of our failure to live up to God's Word, for we will be living in submission to it.

Oh how desperately we need people who will bow to the authority of God's Word. How the morals of our age would change if people did so. How marriages and families and churches would be transformed if people would submit to divine authority. True happiness comes only with conformity as defined by God's authority.

Integrity and Loyalty

Next, the psalmist speaks of the relationship between integrity and loyalty: "I will praise you with uprightness of heart, when I learn your righteous judgements. I will keep your statutes" (vv. 7–8a).

Notice: "I will." "I will." He had a righteous resolve to remain loyal to God. This is the attitude that we all need: a resolve to learn and obey God's Word. This will give us an ever more meaningful relationship with our God. Surrender leads to security and satisfaction. God's Word and prayer are designed to this end.

God's loyal love produces loyal love. How is your love for God? He knows the way you should go. Follow him, and experience true blessedness and prosperity.

Integrity and Humility

Finally, the psalmist speaks of integrity in relation to humility: "Oh, do not forsake me utterly!" (v. 8b). He realises how far short he falls, and so he prays for mercy, for grace to help in the time of need. As much as he loved God, and as much as he wanted to please God, he knew that he needed grace to do it. He makes the same point in v. 176.

Meditating upon God's Word leads to prayer. Being with God in the mind drives us to our knees.

This kind of integrity has nothing to do with self-righteousness. It has everything to do with Jesus Christ and the gospel. The Word of God is able to bring you to the end of yourself, and therefore to bring you to God (see 2 Timothy 3:15).

Conclusion

God's Word produces humility, which drives us to our knees, bringing us closer to our blameless Saviour. And, increasingly, blamelessness results. The apostle John, centuries later, put it this way:

Behold what manner of love the Father has bestowed on us, that we should be called children of God! Therefore the world does not know us, because it did not know him. Beloved, now we are children of God; and it has not yet been revealed what we shall be, but we know that when he is revealed, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is. And everyone who has this hope in him purifies himself, just as he is pure.

(1 John 3:1–3)

Integrity

Psalm 119:1–8

Doug Van Meter

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