

S T U D Y G U I D E



God's Law and the Christian

by R.C. Sproul



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Oh How I Love Your Law

MESSAGE INTRODUCTION

The longest chapter in the entire Bible is Psalm 119, which is an extended meditation on the blessedness of the law of God and of those who walk in its light. Christians today do not often share the psalmist's attitude toward the law. What was once considered a source of joy and delight is now considered to be dangerous—if it is considered at all. In this lecture, Dr. Sproul explains why the psalmist was able to joyfully sing, “Oh, how I love your law,” and why Christians today should be able to do the same.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

1. To be able to explain why love for Christ requires an understanding of the law
2. To be able to explain the relationship between the law of God and the Word of God
3. To be able to explain why the psalmist considered the law to be a source of joy and sweetness

QUOTATIONS

We ought not to be frightened away from the law or to shun its instruction merely because it requires a much stricter moral purity than we shall reach while we bear about with us the prison house of our body. For the law is not now acting toward us as a rigorous enforcement officer who is not satisfied unless the requirements are met. But in this perfection to which it exhorts us, the law points out the goal toward which through life we are to strive. In this the law is no less profitable than consistent with our duty. If we fail not in this struggle, it is well. Indeed, this whole life is a race [cf. 1 Corinthians 9:24-26]; when its course has been run, the Lord will grant us to attain that goal to which our efforts now press forward from afar.

—John Calvin

The law, though it have no power to concern us, has the power to command us.

—Thomas Adams

LECTURE OUTLINE

A. Introduction

1. Psalm 119 is the longest psalm and the longest chapter in the Bible.
2. The whole of this psalm is a celebration of the law of God.
3. Verse 97 of this psalm begins with a profoundly affectionate declaration, “Oh how I love your law!”

B. Loving Christ and Loving the Law

1. We do not often hear people today celebrate the depths of their affection for the law of God.
2. We should ask ourselves what it is about Christ and His work that would cause us now to despise or ignore something that was the focal point of delight in the lives of the Old Testament saints.
3. Believers today will say, “Oh, how I love You, Jesus,” but Christ would respond just as He did in the first century: “If you love me, you will keep my commandments” (John 14:15).

C. The Word of God and the Law of God

1. Verse 101 of Psalm 119 proclaims: “I hold back my feet from every evil way, in order to keep your word.”
2. In our day, we tend to divorce the Word of God from the law of God, but that divorce is not evident in the text of Psalm 119.
3. Throughout the psalm, we see the psalmist reciting his affection for both the law and the Word of God.
4. The law was delivered to the people by the Word of God, and the law that came by the Word of God expressed His commandment.
5. What has changed about God? Is His Word still law? Is He still as sovereign as He was in the Old Testament?

D. The Sweetness of the Law

1. In v. 103 of Psalm 119, the psalmist declares, “How sweet are your words to my taste, sweeter than honey to my mouth!”
2. Honey was probably the sweetest thing in the environment of an ancient Jew.
3. Christians today tend to look at the law as some bitter thing, something that is utterly distasteful.
4. Something is very wrong with the modern attitude toward the law, because the law of God, if it does nothing else, reveals the character of God.
5. If anything should be sweet to the Christian, it is the very character of God Himself.

E. Delighting in the Law of God

1. The psalms begin with a benediction from on high that says, “Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the wicked, nor stands in the way of sinners, nor sits in the seat of the scoffers” (Ps. 1:1)
2. God blesses those who do not live according to the patterns, to the cultural customs, to the general wisdom of ungodly people.
3. Then the psalmist says, “but his delight is in the law of the LORD, and on his law he meditates day and night,” (Ps. 1:2)
4. Today we would probably refer to the man who meditates on God’s law day and night as foolish rather than blessed.
5. Christians who feel like pieces of chaff blown about by the wind need to rediscover the riches of the law of God.
6. Verse 105 of Psalm 119 refers to God’s law as a lamp unto our feet; those who are ignorant of God’s law are walking in the dark.

STUDY QUESTIONS

1. What is unique about Psalm 119?
 - a. It is the only psalm not written by David.
 - b. It is an acrostic that follows the letters of the Greek alphabet.
 - c. It is the only Old Testament text that includes the name “Jesus.”
 - d. It is the longest psalm in the Psalter.
2. What is the subject of Psalm 119?
 - a. It is a celebration of the law of God.
 - b. It is a penitential psalm.
 - c. It is a celebration of the coming Messiah.
 - d. It is an imprecatory psalm.
3. What did Jesus say that those who loved Him would do?
 - a. Be circumcised
 - b. Hate non-Christians
 - c. Become monks and nuns
 - d. Keep His commandments
4. How does the psalmist illustrate the sweetness of God’s law in v. 103?
 - a. He compares it to olive oil
 - b. He compares it to honey
 - c. He compares it to milk
 - d. He compares it to chocolate

5. What is the main thing revealed by the law of God?
 - a. Civil legislation
 - b. God's holy character
 - c. Sacrificial ceremonies
 - d. Petty and obscure rules and regulations

BIBLE STUDY

1. Read Psalm 19:7–11. The psalmist uses several different terms to refer to the law of God (e.g., “testimony”; “statutes”; etc.). What adjectives does he use to describe the law of God? What things does the law of God accomplish, according to the psalmist?
2. Read all of Psalm 119. What insights into the nature of the law do we get from the following verses in this great psalm: 7, 11, 29, 51, 72, 82, 89, 105, 136, 142, and 160?

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Why does a sincere love for Christ demand an understanding of the law of God?
2. How would you explain the difference between the psalmist's attitude toward the law of God and the attitude of many modern Christians?
3. Is it possible for those who reject the ongoing validity of the law to be imitators of Christ (cf. 1 Cor. 11:1) when Christ Himself kept the law perfectly?

APPLICATION

1. Set aside time to focus in on one specific part of the Old Testament law. Read and meditate on each of the Ten Commandments, for example. Or read the book of the covenant in Exodus 21–23. Think about how these laws find their applicability and meaning in a new covenant context.
2. Take the time to read through the Books of the Pentateuch (Genesis–Deuteronomy) as you continue this course. As you read, try to understand why the psalmist would write the way he did about the law. As you go, write down any questions you have. Write down comments about specific passages that stir up the kind of praise expressed in Psalm 119.

SUGGESTED READING FOR FURTHER STUDY

Bolton, Samuel. *The True Bounds of Christian Freedom*
Horton, Michael. *The Law of Perfect Freedom*

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the deep truths of the Christian faith to everyday life.



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